

MYTHICAL MONSTERS



in contemporary society

an exhibition by Heri Dono

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HERI DONO

"I am not involved in political or social problems, if you will – but my paintings, maybe they mirror politics or society. The main thing is that the social structure must be turned around 180 degrees.

My obsessions are especially concerning humanity in general. I use humour in my work. Imagine, a person who doesn't look deeper into my paintings will laugh, see my work as an expression of hilarity. I am not only involved with problems of visual art. I am involved in society.

Laughter can only be healing if one sees things the way they are. This includes ugliness around and within us, the absurdity of ourselves and others, and the beasts with which we populate our internal and external worlds."

MYTHICAL MONSTERS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Heri Dono is one of Indonesia's **most famous avant-garde painters**, and installation and performance artists. He has astounded audiences worldwide, with an in-your-face genre of cartoon-character-meets-Indonesian *wayang*. Distorted human and animal figures are created in bold lines and colours. They seem mythological yet futuristic; sexual yet comical; sacred yet perverse.

Renowned art writer Astri Wright puts Heri Dono "among the most experimentally-minded of the young generation of artists in Indonesia". Japanese art critics say Heri Dono is "an artist to watch out for".

Mythological Monsters in Contemporary Society is Heri Dono's first exhibition in Singapore ever, bringing a renegade tone to the otherwise mild-mannered local art scene. It is also a long-awaited one, being the first after a 10-year hiatus from exhibiting in Southeast Asia. Though based in Indonesia, the past decade has seen Heri Dono active in the international art arena: New York, Tokyo, Basel, Amsterdam, Brisbane, Vancouver, Manila, Heemstede, Delft, Groningen and Tilburg (Netherlands).

Heri Dono's works can be found in the collections of the Singapore Art Museum, Fukuoka Art Museum, Okinawa Art Museum, Museum der Kulturen Basel and Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal, to name a few.

Dreams are an extension of reality.

And so begins the reconciliation of paradoxes that is Heri Dono. The humorous and the frightening, the good and bad, happiness and anxiety, the self and the world, are – like the Yin and Yang - interlocked in the vivid characters that make up Heri Dono's art.

To reconcile is Heri Dono's rudiment of life.

To identify, compare and interrelate these polarities is a soul-searching process and is one that he has applied to all aspects of his work. This is an artist who has given a machine a soul, an electrical current life, the television a will. His emphasis on the interdependence of human life and machines and their interchanging characteristics (humans becoming more mechanical, machines becoming more creative) may seem comical on canvas but depict a social and cultural phenomenon that is very real.

The jarring colours on Heri's palette have morphed into representations of global concerns.

Igniting laughter with his explosive images, Heri offers an escape even in an unhappy situation.

This is evident in the cartoon-character-meets-wayang creatures he has created on his canvases. The garish colours and gargoyles lend an obvious element of humour in contemporary social and political dilemmas. Common human activities are contrasted with outrageous monster forms, often in the process of metamorphosis or dismemberment, threatening each other with guns, teeth and claws.

To Heri, his artistic career is a continuous learning process. While he hopes to impart his social and political insights to the audience, he is also eager to enter into a dialogue and learn from the reactions of his audience.

The influence of **WAYANG**

While some have likened Heri's works to the cubist ideas of Picasso and Georges Braque, his inspirations are solely based on the traditional designs of *wayang* puppets, which were created even before the invention of cubism in the early 20th century. Like the puppet carvings, Heri's technicoloured creatures are "flattened" onto the canvas so that different sides of each figure can be shown simultaneously from various angles, defining objects in two-dimensional terms of the canvas.

Wayang puppets are used to enact the stories of kings, heroes, gods and demons from Javanese history and mythology as well as the Hindu epics, the Mahabhrata and the Ramayana. In these stories, political and social power groupings shift and realign in perpetual struggle. Heri Dono's work reveals the vital significance of traditional art in underpinning contemporary practices, which also incorporate western approaches.

The experimentally-minded Heri became acquainted with renowned local puppeteer and puppet carver Sukasman in 1987.

Through him, Heri studied the history, symbolism, design and methods of the *wayang* puppets. And it was the visual distortions of the *wayang* puppets that became an important factor in Heri's creative development: long, jutting neck, large eyes, long nose and wide mouth.

The traditional art form of *wayang* taught him that these were not mere exaggerations but necessary features to convey the character's personality across a distance. Heri became involved in *wayang*, which created a stimulus for performance art.

These features directly influenced the forms of people, animals or monsters in his paintings.

He has brought about installations, environmental art, and multimedia performances, which radically transform the *wayang* shadow puppet tradition.