

# Re - PLAY # 1

15.01 – 15.02 2013

HERI  
DONO

## Heri Dono

Heri Dono is unquestionably one among the Indonesian contemporary artists from the late 1980s generation that are best known to contemporary art international community. Since early in his career up to now he has been around the world to respond to exhibition and workshop invitations in various countries, Heri Dono is known through his installation that results from his experiments with the most popular Javanese folk theater: wayang. In the wayang performance a number of artistic and extra-artistic elements - visual arts, singing, music, storytelling, mythology, promotion of a philosophy of life, social criticisms, and humor - merge into a coherent unity to make a generic performance comprising complex elements of multimedia. Moreover all this is coupled with the setting of a wayang performance event that provides space for social interaction among the audience. Heri Dono installations give the best example of the attempts at creatively revitalizing traditional art practice profoundly rooted in Indonesia. In a lot of his installations and performances, Heri Dono effectively makes use of performativity and interactivity potencies so that the works are involved in intense dialogs with their audiences.

In his paintings Heri Dono makes the most use of wild deformations and free fantasies out of which emerge characters of wayang stories. Adding his profound knowledge of children's cartoon films, animation films, and comics, Heri Dono's canvas is always filled with highly astonishing characters of intertwined fantastic and absurd stories. In all these Heri Dono will sometimes insert his own critical remarks on socio-political issues in Indonesia and abroad. ■

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## “Pseudo- Development Ancestors”

by  
Cassandra Lehman-Schultz

### HERI DONO – Pseudo-Development Ancestors

»There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another.«

Walter Benjamin

Ten yellow dinosaurs are situated as a pack set to hunt in and around the environs of the OFCA exhibition space ... Each bears the head not of a dinosaur but of a political dictator: Idi Amin, Saddam Hussein, Fidel Castro, Adolf Hitler, George W. Bush, Osama Bin Laden, Josef Stalin, Vladimir Lenin, and Mao Tse Tung all carry machine guns, dynamite and weapons of war. Only Karl Marx, whom artist Heri Dono sees as a philosopher rather than a military leader, carries a knife as a symbol of work rather than war.

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Of an almost intimidating scale, the sculptures are caught between the size of human and beast, larger than man yet smaller than the prehistoric predator. More side-show alley than natural history museum, they are big enough to run you down, yet clumsy enough to be knocked over. Their color, scale and mismatched bodies and heads give them a somewhat comical appearance. Their heads move with mouths open as if emitting a call to charge, while only a cacophony of static radio noises, accompanied by a constant chirruping of crickets, comes from the small lit up panels open in each of the figures' chests. Dono compares the voices on the radio to a John Cage composition, nonsensical and indecipherable. They utter promises, which cannot be understood, let alone kept. The Indonesian word for cricket is Jangkrik, a euphemism for bullshit or the jabbering spread of untruths. The small insect is seen as a noisy creature with a big voice, a pesky loudmouth.

Each dictator/dinosaur is painted the same crude shade of cartoon yellow, reminiscent of the character of Homer Simpson. In the Indonesian context, the color yellow is infused with a particular political charge. Color became politicized during the Reformasi period, when the Golkar Party was founded. As red and green were the colors associated with Socialist and Islam, yellow became the color for the Golkar Party. According to Dirk Toms in his book *Party Politics And Democratization In Indonesia: Golkar in the Post-Suharto Era*, the Suharto regime may have selected the color in honor of the students of the University of Indonesia, who wore yellow jackets during protests against Sukarno in 1965-66, or simply because the color represents wisdom, good education and noble character.



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- 8 Although initial appearances present them as threatening, these yellow dinosaurs are inert. The once dominant and terrifying T-rex, on which Dono's sculptures were modeled, has become extinct through its failure to adapt. The artist suggests that, although we have evolved to resemble something else, we, as a species, may still have retained the DNA of the dinosaur. We have not evolved, in essence, and are perhaps also doomed to fail.

Dono often uses dinosaurs in his work, occasionally even renaming them Dono-saurs. His earlier work, a painting titled *Dinosaurs Going to the City*, presents the misplaced beasts in a cityscape. Installing the work for Re-PLAY #1, the artist responds to the beautiful garden surroundings of OFCA, placing the dinosaurs as though they are returning to nature. As with their earlier venture to the city, the hybrid forms are misplaced in this environment too; caught between the natural and man-made world. In this context, however, nature persists as clean, fresh and ordered.

*Dinosaurs Going to the City*, 2006, 224 cm x 345 cm



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*Pseudo-Development Ancestors* was originally presented as part of the artist's solo exhibition *Nobody's Land* in 2008, when Saddam Hussein was still at large and George W. Bush still in power. The work seen again in the context of *Re-PLAY* presents an opportunity to revisit these themes and see them realigned, historically and contemporarily

Dono's training in traditional wayang kulit is evident in much of his work. Poised for battle, *Pseudo-Development's* mythical man/beasts appear puppet like, similar to the characters of the struggle-filled Mahabharata. Unlike Western fairy tales, where good always triumphs over evil, the issues remain unresolved and the struggle ongoing. Dono asks why Krisna, who represents the future, did not foretell the futility of war. Instead, great battles are fought; gods, princes and armies are destroyed, with ordinary man simply noted as collateral damage.

Such traditional tales do not contain any reference to human rights. Perhaps, for Dono, this is the root of the issue. Rights are also standards, but how does one set a single set of standards in a country so diverse in culture, ethics, history, politics and socio-economic conditions? He talks about the Javanese concept of *Nrimo*, a state of acceptance: "I work hard and accept what comes". In *Re-PLAY*, *Pseudo-Development Ancestors'* dinosaurs continue to charge forward to the sounds of chirruping insects and static nonsense, while no one confronts them and nothing opposes them. The outcome perhaps is inevitable. ■

See Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the philosophy of history*. In: Harry Zohn (ed.), *Illuminations*. Schocken Books, New York, 1969, p. 256.

**Cassandra Lehman-Schultz**

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Re-PLAY is an ongoing series of solo exhibitions of visual art, initiated by Office For Contemporary Art (OFCA) International in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. For this program, OFCA International has intensively collaborated with PartNER as event organizer.

Based on the idea, that an artwork is the result of intellectual production – a living and continuously growing process – the event focuses on re-displaying artworks which had been presented to the public in Indonesia once before. In doing so, it enables the audience to analyze, read and reflect the artist's thought in a deeper way. Not through the means of representation but in the form of re-visiting: in a concrete, physical experience.

Title, curatorial concept and the selection of artworks are based on the Indonesian expression "main" (play) in its multiplicity of meaning.

Re-PLAY #1 is launched in 2013 in the exhibition space of OFCA International. Its first edition proudly presents Pseudo-Development Ancestors of re-known artist Heri Dono. The monumental installation had been exhibited to high critical acclaim in Dono's solo exhibition Nobody's Land (2008) at the National Gallery of Jakarta. The work consists of ten large scale Dinosaur-sculptures; their heads resembling portraits of world-famous figures such as Karl Marx, Mao Tse Tung, George W. Bush, Idi Amin, Saddam Hussein, Adolf Hitler, Osama bin Laden, Vladimir Lenin, Fidel Castro and Josef Stalin.

### special thank

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OFCA International  
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