

**THE FIRST**

**ASIA-PACIFIC**

**OF CONTEMPORARY ART**

**TRIENNIAL**

**BRISBANE AUSTRALIA 1993**

## HERI DONO

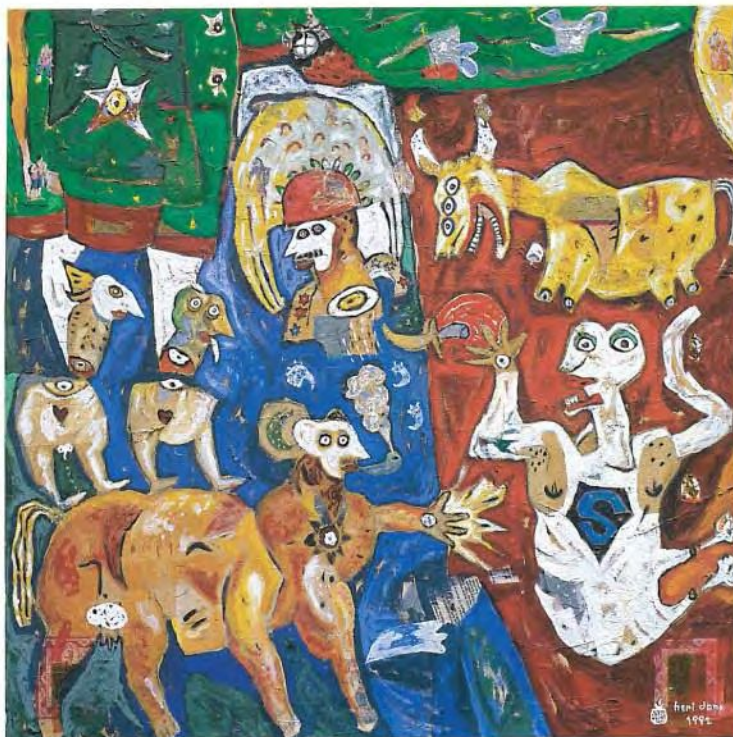
Heri Dono was born in 1960 in Jakarta, Indonesia and was raised in Semarang, Central Java. Between 1980 and 1987 he studied at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta. At the time there was a debate on Indonesian identity. Despite the considerable opposition to Western art influences by his teachers, Heri Dono concluded that seeking inspiration in the work of other artists was a natural part of the creative dialogue, and gave close attention to the work of Picasso, Juan Miró and Van Gogh.

He was also deeply interested in everything around him — traditional Indonesian arts as well as the social realities of contemporary Indonesian life. For the artist, it was 'important to look to everything that exists in Indonesia for creative inspiration'. In 1987 he met Sukasman, an artist who works closely with a traditional *wayang* puppet carver to create *wayang* puppets in new designs. For Heri Dono, it was an encounter with traditional art which was important for his later development. He explained:

Guided by Sukasman, I studied traditional *wayang* and their distortions: the long forward-stretched neck, large eyes, long nose and wide mouths. And I realised that these exaggerations were not mere conventions, they were also necessary to convey the personality of the character across a considerable distance.

His experimentation with *wayang* puppets directly influenced the images of people and animals in his paintings, and also brought him to installation work. At first, he tried to put puppets on his canvas. Later, they developed to three-dimensional work and finally to installations.

Today, Heri Dono is the most established installation and performance artist in Indonesia. He has held five solo exhibitions in Indonesia as well as a show entitled 'Unknown Dimensions' in Basel, Switzerland. His work has been represented in many group exhibitions including the '4th Biennale of Indonesian Young Painters', Ismail Marzuki Cultural Center, Jakarta, 1984; '3rd ASEAN Young Artists Exhibition', Indonesian Institute of the Arts, Yogyakarta, 1985; 'Modern Indonesian Art', Indonesian Festival, touring the United States, 1990–91; 'Destructive Images', performance art, Senisono Gallery, Yogyakarta, 1991; and 'New Art from South-East Asia', Fukuoka Art Museum, Japan, 1992. His many awards include that for Best Painting, Indonesian Institute of the Arts,



**Campaign of the three parties** 1992  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
98x98.5cm

Bottom  
**Kuda Binal (The wild horse)** 1992  
Performance  
Yogyakarta

Yogyakarta, 1981 and the Lempad Prize, Sanggar Dewata, Bali, 1992.

Heri Dono's paintings are expressive, wild and humorous. Images in his paintings are mostly unidentified creatures whose distortions have much in common with the *wayang* puppets and cartoons. The background scenes to his paintings, however, are drawn from his perception of real life — many are cynical, erotic, bitter or crazy.

'The world is crazy, frightening,' he once said. 'Look at the hunger in Africa, for example. They need food, but they got bullets.' His works reflect wide-ranging issues: famine in Africa, the torture of political prisoners, unemployment, drugs, and political violence. He has said, 'For me it is important how art could serve humanity'. However, he notes that his work is an expression of his feelings not an opinion.

*Watching the marginal people* (1992) portrays the life of rural people in metropolitan centres and their alienation from urban life. It consists of a very large panel with ten heads attached. The faces are half human and half animal, with eyes that are connected to an electric motor; the eyes move wildly and noisily from side to side. Above the heads are hung strange creatures in which amplified clockwork produces the sound of termites.

His ability to engineer art forms and media from quite different contexts is illustrated by another work, *The wild horse* (1992), which

blends a traditional performing art known as Magic Horse (a folk magical dance) with installation. The performance is presented in a public space and played by a group of children. Within the performance, however, Heri Dono created an installation which also functions as a setting. The hobbyhorses of the traditional dance are replaced by strange creatures which recall the images in his paintings. The properties are similar to *wayang* puppets. But what were formerly painted images have here become moving, tangible objects — no longer simply expressive, but shocking.

Jim Supangkat

