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VISITOR'S INFORMATION

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Fridays, 10am to 9pm

ADMISSION

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| Adult | \$ 10 |
| Student (with valid student card) | \$ 5 |
| Senior citizens (Non-Singaporeans) | \$ 5 |

Groups of 20 or more: 20% off admission tickets for adults.

FREE ADMISSION

- On Open House Days
- For NHB Member Schools
- For Children below 6 years old
- For Seniors (Singaporeans & PR)
- On Fridays, 6pm to 9pm

MUSEUM TOURS AT SAM

Tours in English
Mondays: 2pm
Tuesdays to Thursdays: 11am and 2pm
Fridays: 11am, 2pm and 7pm
Saturdays and Sundays: 11am, 2pm and 3pm

Tours in Japanese
Tuesdays to Fridays: 10:30am

Tours in Mandarin
Fridays: 7:45pm

ADDRESSES

Singapore Art Museum is located at
71 Bras Basah Road, Singapore 189555.

SAM (8Q) is located at
8 Queen Street, Singapore 188535.

WEBSITE

www.singaporeartmuseum.sg

GENERAL ENQUIRIES

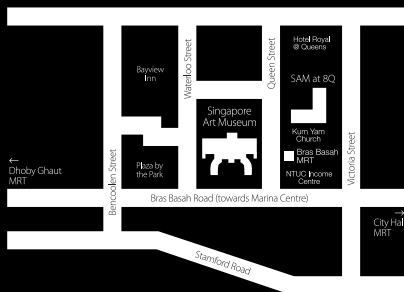
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HOW TO GET TO SAM

By bus
SBS 7, 14, 16, 36, 111, 131, 162, 175, 502, 518
SMRT 77, 167, 171, 700

By MRT
2-minute walk from Bras Basah MRT station
(From 17 April 2010 onwards).
10-minute walk from Dhoby Ghaut / City Hall MRT stations.

By car
Carparks available at Waterloo Street, Queen Street,
NTUC Income Centre and Plaza by the Park.



WHEELCHAIR ACCESS / LOCKERS

Lifts provide easy access to galleries.
Lockers are available for visitors' use.



Credit Suisse: Innovation In Art Series

FX Harsono: Testimonies
4 March to 9 May 2010

About the Artist



Any discussion of the history of contemporary art in Indonesia would be incomplete without an examination of FX Harsono's art and practice. Harsono's works are remarkable in that they span four tumultuous decades in Indonesian art and history, and have borne witness to a multitude of changes and upheavals in Indonesian politics, society, and culture. Throughout this time, Harsono has continued to question his role as an artist and his position in society, constantly pushing his art and practice to reflect and engage with new social and cultural contexts.

The Indonesian art world first encountered FX Harsono as a restless young artist in the 1970s. One of the founding members of the *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (GSRB) or New Art Movement in 1975, Harsono — together with his

GSRB compatriots — was already experimenting with new modes of art-making which incorporated found objects and conceptual approaches. By the 1990s, he had established himself as a force in Indonesian contemporary art, creating powerful installations with strident social commentary. These compelling works, which critiqued the regime of power and oppression in Indonesia, gained critical attention and were widely exhibited abroad.

The closing years of the 1990s were marked by a series of societal shockwaves which reverberated throughout the nation, in particular, the economic meltdown of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis generated a groundswell of public anger. In 1998, this culminated in days of brutal street violence and the fall of Suharto's New Order. Indonesian-Chinese artists like Harsono experienced a

profound sense of disillusionment, as the events of May 1998 revealed that the very 'people' he had fought for through his art were just as capable of brutality as the political regime, and worse — these people would turn on each other. With the veneer of control under Suharto's 'strongman' regime removed, the fractures in Indonesian society revealed themselves more painfully than ever, particularly along ethnic lines. It was then that Harsono's art began to look inwards, as the artist intensively scrutinised his identity and place in society.

To date, Harsono has continued to raise troubling questions about the position of minorities and the disenfranchised in Indonesia. His most recent body of work draws on his family history, in an investigative journey that reveals the intersection of the personal with the political.

Driven by his belief that an artist needs to constantly engage with society and its issues, Harsono has consistently navigated the shifting currents of Indonesia's socio-political realities, deftly re-aligning his practice to most effectively address urgent issues in Indonesian society and culture. As such, Harsono is widely respected by the Indonesian art community. His pioneering efforts in the early days of contemporary art's development have paved the way for a new generation of artists who look up to him as an icon. Besides his art practice, Harsono also lectures on Art and Design, and writes regularly about social issues and the development of contemporary art. He continues to nurture and challenge the next generation of artists, and contributes to art discourse and debate in Indonesia.

About the Exhibition

This exhibition pays tribute to FX Harsono and traces the shifts in the artist's strategies of representation: from the ground-breaking conceptual works that re-defined art making during the *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (GSRB) or New Art Movement of the 1970s; to the politically-charged installations of the 1990s; concluding with the artist's recent investigations into issues of self, identity and personal history.

Included in this survey are seminal works drawn from the Singapore Art Museum's permanent collection, as well as from other art institutions and private collections, such as *Paling Top* (1975) and *Voice Without Voice* (1994).

Through these various 'testimonies', the exhibition offers a glimpse of the political, social and cultural changes that have shaped Indonesian society, and the artist's constant re-evaluation and re-positioning of his role throughout this recent history.

BELOW: **FX Harsono, *Voice Without Voice / Sign***, 1993 – 4, Silkscreen on canvas (9 panels), wooden stools and stamps, 143.5 x 95.5 cm each panel, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum collection.



Local Political and Cultural Activities

| Period Year | 1800 - 1880 | 1880 - 1920 | 1920 - 1945 | 1945 - 1949 | 1950 - 1965 | 1966 - 1969 |
|-------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | <p>The formation of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) to administer Java.</p> <p>Birth of Raden Saleh in possibly 1807.</p> <p>Raden Saleh's tutelage under A.A.J. Payen in Bogor and later C. Kruseman and A. Schelfhout in Holland (1829-1839).</p> | <p>The emergence of Indonesia's first nationalist movement, the <i>Budi Utomo</i>, which opposed Dutch colonialism.</p> <p>Dutch East Indies (or Indo-European) painters active in Southeast Asia.</p> | <p>The first Indonesian Youth Congress formulated the <i>Sumpah Pemuda</i> (Youth Oath) in 1928 to establish unity amongst the people of the archipelago, which promoted three national ideals: One Motherland, One Nation, One Language.</p> <p>Regional nationalist organisations such as the <i>Jong Java</i> and the <i>Jong Ambon</i> were consolidated by nationalist movements such as the <i>Indonesia Muda</i> and <i>Gerindo</i> (Indonesian Movement), which was under the leadership of Amir Syarifuddin and Adnan Kapau Gani.</p> <p>Sutarjo Kartohadikusumo presented a petition to the Dutch demanding greater Indonesian autonomy in 1936.</p> <p>Development of the <i>Mooi Indies</i> (Beautiful Indies) movement of 'Self-Orientalism', which was similar to the Amorsolo School of the Philippines. Artists of the <i>Mooi Indies</i> painted romanticised and idealised landscapes and rural workers.</p> <p>Founding of <i>Persagi</i> (Oct 1938). <i>Persagi's</i> goal is to develop fine art among the Indonesian people through an Indonesian style.</p> <p>First <i>Persagi</i> exhibition in 1938 at the Kolf book shop in Jakarta. <i>Persagi</i> was disbanded by the Japanese in 1942.</p> <p>S. Sudjojono's critical articles published in <i>Seni Loekis, Kesenian dan Seniman</i>, which derided the <i>Mooi Indies</i> movement as shallow, quasi-romantic and erotic, advocating instead a specifically Indonesian style of art.</p> | <p>Indonesia achieved independence in 1949.</p> <p>First congress on culture held in Magelang, 1948, which was chaired by Wongsonegoro, S.H. Members of <i>Seniman Muda Indonesia</i> (SIM) and <i>Pelukis Rakyat</i> held a joint exhibition during the congress.</p> | <p>Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (LEKRA, People's Cultural Organisation) was formed. As the cultural arm of the Indonesian communist party, it insisted on the subordination of art to political aims of revolutionary ideals.</p> <p>In a response to LEKRA's dominance in the cultural sphere, the <i>Manifesto Kebudayaan</i> (Cultural Manifesto) was issued on Independence Day, August 17, 1963. The Manifesto promoted the philosophy of Pancasila as an alternative to LEKRA's Marxist ideals.</p> <p>An abortive coup by the <i>Gerakan 30 September</i> (30th of September Group) allows General Suharto to consolidate his power, severely weakening Sukarno's political influence. Blaming the attempted coup on the Indonesian Communist Party, a bloody anti-communist purge is launched, effectively marking the end of LEKRA.</p> | <p>Suharto forces Sukarno to transfer executive powers to himself, using these powers to dissolve the Indonesian Communist Party in 1966. Over the next two years, Suharto would assume the presidency, consigning Sukarno to house arrest.</p> <p>Art festival held in conjunction with the opening of <i>Taman Ismail Marzuki</i> Art Centre in Central Java in 1968.</p> <p>Lecturers at ASRI introduced Euro-American art history, theory and styles of modern art to students.</p> <p>Teachers of ASRI and the ITB's Faculty of Fine Art and Design held a large exhibition in 1969, marking a culmination of the increase in momentum toward exhibiting art.</p> |

Art Activities

Local Political and Cultural Activities

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Increasing student dissatisfaction with the authority of the Ministry of Education and Culture, which organised juried art competitions.</p> | <p>President Suharto fuses political parties into a three party system. The Nationalist and Christian parties are merged into the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) and Muslim parties into the United Development Party (PPP). The new three-party system is dominated by Suharto's party, <i>Golkar</i>.</p> | | <p>The People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) elevates <i>Pancasila</i> (Five Principles) to the status of compulsory moral education for government officials and the youth in 1978. <i>Pancasila</i> was the official philosophy of Indonesia, comprising five nationalist principles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Belief in the one and only God, (in Indonesian, <i>Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa</i>). 2. Just and civilised humanity, (in Indonesian, <i>Kemanusiaan Yang Adil dan Beradab</i>). 3. The unity of Indonesia, (in Indonesian, <i>Persatuan Indonesia</i>). 4. Democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations amongst representatives, and (in Indonesian, <i>Kerakyatan Yang Dipimpin oleh Hikmat Kebijaksanaan, Dalam Permusyawaratan Perwakilan, dan</i> 5. Social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia (in Indonesian, <i>Keadilan Sosial bagi seluruh Rakyat Indonesia</i>) |
| <p>Period</p> | <p>1972-1973</p> | <p>1973 – 1975</p> | <p>1976 – 1978</p> |
| <p>Year</p> | <p>1970</p> | <p>1974</p> | <p>1975</p> |
| <p>The Surabaya Group, called <i>Akseera</i> or <i>Akademi Seni Rupa Surabaya</i> (Surabaya Art Academy) organised an exhibition with works that employed a style distinct to Surabaya.</p> | <p>Formation of <i>Kelompok 5</i> (Group of 5), which included Hardi, FX Harsono, B. Munny Ardhi, Siti Adiati and Nanik Mirna from ASRI. <i>Kelompok 5</i> organised exhibitions that explored new ways of thinking and making art in Jakarta, Solo, Semarang and Surabaya.</p> | <p>The Black December Manifesto was issued as a response to the conservatism and favouritism of the judges of the 1974 <i>Grand Exhibition of Indonesian Painting</i> favouring decorative paintings by established artists.</p> <p>The Black December Manifesto called for experimental, anti-lyrical and new ways of thinking and making art drawn from the social and cultural conditions of Indonesia.</p> | <p>Organised by young artists sympathetic to the Black December artists, the <i>Nusantara-Nusantara</i> (Archipelago-Archipelago) exhibition questioned the premise that traditional art should be the source for the development of contemporary Indonesian art.</p> <p>With the support of the Jakarta Art Council, the <i>Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru</i> (New Art Movement) exhibition was held at the TIM art centre in 1975. Works employing a diverse range of materials and form were showcased, including installations, assemblages, and ready-mades. This exhibition marked the start of the New Art Movement's conceptual tendencies.</p> <p>The second exhibition organised by the <i>Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru</i> in 1977.</p> |

Art Activities

Local Political and Cultural Activities

The Petition of Fifty: a statement of concern delivered to parliament concerning the use of government power, propaganda, and presidential personality cult, in reaction to the authoritarianism of President Suharto by upper middle class reformists.

All organisations of any kind had to adopt *Pancasila* as their sole basis from 1985.

Suharto shuts down *Tempo* and two other publications for critical reporting of Habibie's purchase of most of the former East German navy. Habibie was appointed Vice President by Suharto and later assumed Presidency after Suharto stepped down.

On 12 May 1998, four students were shot dead at the Trisakti University, sparking public anger with government forces resulting in unrest. Nine days later, deserted by his supporters and facing widespread civil unrest, President Suharto was forced to resign.

Indonesia's first free and fair national elections since 1955 took place in 1999 with almost no disruption and strong voter turnout. Of the 48 parties which contested the elections, only 21 won at least one seat, with no party holding a majority.

In November 2008, the Indonesian parliament passed an anti-pornography bill proposed by a special committee formed to look into the problem of pornography's reach and its effects upon Indonesian society. The passing of the bill raised passionate discussions within art and cultural circles, the majority dismayed and angered by the seeming tightening of what they viewed as, already draconian laws. Many Indonesian artists created works in response to the bill.

| Period | 1979 - 1987 | 1989 - 1997 | 1998 - 2004 | 2005 onwards |
|--------|---|---|---|--|
| Year | 1979 | 1988 | 1997 | |
| | <p>The <i>Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru</i> disbanded as the artists who were involved went into different artistic directions. Many of these artists began to work in advertising and graphic industries.</p> | <p>Establishment of the Cemeti Gallery in Yogyakarta by Mella Jaarsma and Nindityo Adipurnomo, which supported younger artists who were keen to explore experimental art forms.</p> | <p>Closure of the Senisono Art Gallery for its support of experimental art deemed subversive, resulting in protests by intellectuals, artists and cultural activists.</p> | <p>Increasing influence of the art market resulting in some artists producing commercial works following contemporary trends in China.</p> <p>Plurality in the use of contemporary idioms beyond politically motivated installation and performance art into street art, video art and net-art.</p> <p>The practices of artists such as FX Harsono underwent distinct changes, illustrating their disillusionment with the failed promises of liberalisation, such as increased freedom of expression.</p> |

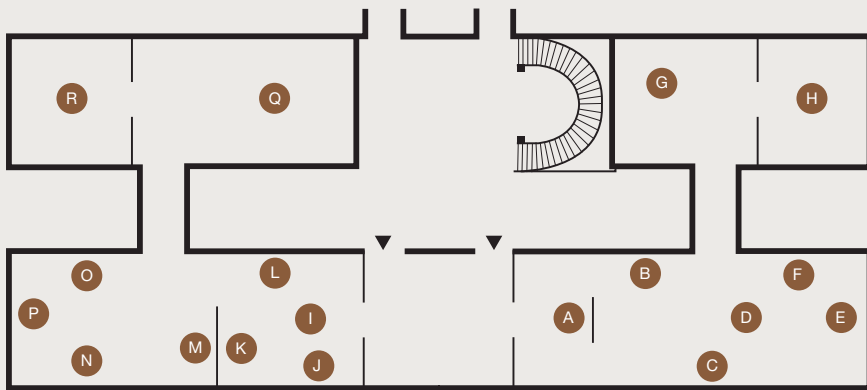
The East Asian Financial Crisis leads to a devaluation of regional currencies, such as the Indonesian Rupiah and Thai Baht. The economic chaos prompts several months of civil unrest.

Slot in the Box exhibition was organised by the Cemeti Gallery in 1997 to address issues concerning the Presidential electoral process in Indonesia, which favoured the ruling party. FX Harsono performed *Destruksi* in this exhibition.

Art Activities

Exhibition Map

Singapore Art Museum
Level 2



- | | |
|---|--|
| A <i>Paling Top '75 (The Most Top '75)</i> | J <i>Open Your Mouth</i> |
| B <i>Rantai yang Santai (The Relaxed Chain)</i> | K <i>Kuteropong (Watching The Wound)</i> |
| C <i>Voice Without Voice / Sign</i> | L <i>Tubuhku Adalah Lahan (My Body As A Field)</i> |
| D <i>Burned Victims</i> | M <i>Thousand Times Pain</i> |
| E <i>Destruction</i> | N <i>Preserving Life, Terminating Life #1</i> |
| F <i>Republik Indochoaos</i> | O <i>Preserving Life, Terminating Life #2</i> |
| G <i>The Voices Controlled by the Powers</i> | P <i>Needle In My Consciousness</i> |
| H <i>Power and the Oppressed</i> | Q <i>nDudah</i> |
| I <i>Bon Appetit</i> | R <i>Rewriting The Erased</i> |

“The development of contemporary art in Yogyakarta is inseparable from the role of the ASRI (The Indonesian Art Academy) as an establishment that, up until the mid-1980s, consistently attempted to maintain the elitism of modern art. What the students of ASRI did was to struggle against authoritarian power. For the sake of this struggle, some had to quit the institution before completing their academic studies.”

Today, not all of these artists continue with that struggle. Perhaps the most consistent and productive is FX Harsono, a keen organiser of exhibitions, who has made a significant contribution to the contemporary art world in Yogyakarta and Jakarta.”

~ Sumartono, art historian, in *The Role of Power in Contemporary Yogyakarta Art*, 2001

From Black December to New Art Movement: The Beginnings of Contemporary Art in Indonesia

The emergence of contemporary art in Indonesia may be traced to groups of young artists in Yogyakarta and Bandung, who began to experiment with new forms of art that challenged the aesthetic and theoretical conventions of modern art largely defined by painting and sculpture. FX Harsono and four other fellow students from the Indonesian Arts Academy (ASRI) were part of one such Yogyakarta-based group called *Kelompok 5* (Group of Five). The Group of Five garnered considerable media attention, both for their prolificity in organising exhibitions across Indonesia, as well as their vocal criticisms of ASRI's aesthetic conservatism and institutional dominance.

One such criticism took the form of their involvement in a dispute with the

administration of ASRI, culminating in what is now known as the 'Black December Affair'. In 1974, on the occasion of the *Grand Exhibition Of Indonesian Painting*, a showcase of works deemed the 'best' exemplars of Indonesian art, 14 artists including FX Harsono signed and issued the Black December Manifesto, in response to the jury's conservatism and display of favouritism towards more established artists, such as Widayat, Abas Alibasyah and AD Pirous. Flowers were also delivered to the judges on the last night of the Grand Exhibition with a ribbon attached, which read:

Ikut berduka cita atas kematian seni lukis kita

(Condolences on the death of Indonesian painting)

This gesture openly challenged the judges' preference for decorative painting, and the students' actions were largely welcomed in Jakarta and Bandung. In response to this challenge, ASRI suspended its students who were signatory to the Manifesto, with Abbas Alibasyah, the then director of ASRI issuing a public denunciation of the students as destabilising forces and impediments to Indonesia's development.

In August 1975, a mere eight months after the Black December Affair, the Group of Five and other artists from Bandung, together with noted art critic and lecturer Sanento Yuliman, established the *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (GSRB) or New Art Movement, and organised an exhibition at the Ismail Marzuki Art Centre, Jakarta (TIM). Works presented in this

exhibition broke new artistic ground and raised issues beyond the field of art to address socio-economic as well as political matters. This continued the directions outlined in the earlier Black December Manifesto that called for artists to develop socially engaged artistic practices. The GSRB artists also issued a manifesto, known as the *Lima Jurus Gebrakan Gerakan Seni Rupa Indonesia* (The Five Lines of Attack of the Indonesian New Art Movement).

Paling Top '75 (The Most Top '75)

1975

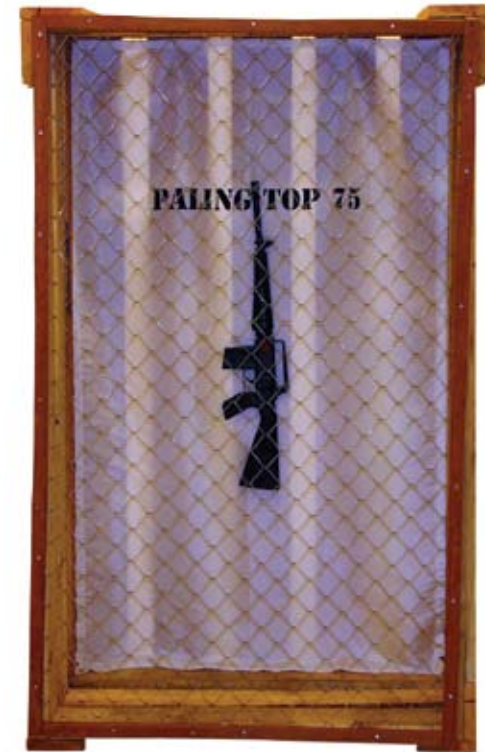
Plastic gun, textile, wooden crate, wire mesh

50 x 100 x 157 cm

Artist collection

Artists from the *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (New Art Movement), such as FX Harsono, Jim Supangkat, Nanik Mirna and art critic Sanento Yuliman called for new approaches to the theory and practice of art, beyond the limits of painting and sculpture. Using objects familiar to everyday life was a way in which artists from the New Art Movement produced works that related to local experiences, and challenged existing artistic conventions dominated by the practice of painting.

In *Paling Top '75*, FX Harsono rejected the notion of the 'artist's hand' — visible traces such as brushstrokes in a painting — as one of the elements which give an artwork its significance or aura. As an alternative, he appropriated commonplace objects, such as a purchased toy gun and a wooden crate, which he paid a carpenter to fabricate. The use of ready-made and everyday objects to make artworks challenged the institutions of art education such as the Bandung Institute of



Technology (ITB) and the Indonesian Arts Academy (ASRI) in Yogyakarta, which defined fine art as painting and sculpture personally executed by the artist in accepted media, such as oil paint. Rejecting the need for artists to actually make their works also went against principles espoused by modern artists like S. Sudjojono, who advocated the idea of *jiwa ketok* — the artist's 'soul made visible' on the canvas.

Paling Top '75 also confronts social and political reality head-on. The toy gun encased in a wooden crate with wire mesh symbolises the power of the military in all facets of life in Indonesia, and the subjugation of the Indonesian people to this power. Under Suharto's New Order regime, where art was deliberately de-politicised, such critical political commentary in art was a risky endeavour and made patently clear a belief that art needs to actively engage with society and its politics.

Rantai yang Santai (The Relaxed Chain)

1975

Installation with cushions and chains

67 x 97 x 56 cm

Artist collection

The New Order (1965 – 1998) established by President Suharto de-politicised art in Indonesia by oppressing through various means those artists deemed to have aligned themselves with political organisations such as the People's Cultural Organisation (LEKRA), which was influenced by

the Indonesian Communist Party. Artists who produced works that were perceived as being political or critical of the New Order faced similar consequences. This climate of fear was not restricted to artists, as all opponents to the authoritarian regime were brutally suppressed. *Rantai yang Santai* makes visible



the oppressive climate that prevailed during the New Order years. For FX Harsono, it was a powerful statement on how the military's presence was so pervasive in all facets of Indonesian life, that it even haunted one's dreams and moments of repose. At the same time, as the English translation of the artwork

title suggests, the juxtaposition of the cushion (symbolising relaxation) and the chain (a metaphor for imprisonment) begs the question: have we become so accustomed to the suppression of free speech and expression that we find oppression and injustice comforting and familiar?

Challenge and Critique: Art In The New Order Years

Suharto's New Order years in Indonesia (1965 – 1998) were characterised by an authoritarian government, selective but effective repression of opposition, and a politicisation of the military. The overall spirit and practices of the New Order have since been referred to pejoratively by the acronym KKN (*Korupsi, Kolusi, Nepotisme* – corruption, collusion, nepotism). Under the New Order, the cultural sphere was also de-politicised, and this had a direct impact on the policies and directions of art institutions and the art market. Art academies like ASRI for example, remained largely conservative and suspicious of alternative art forms. The art market, which gained momentum during the economic boom of the 1990s, was also largely driven by collectors employed by major corporations and the organs of state – the major beneficiaries of Suharto's economy. By deploying their prodigious wealth, these collectors became de facto art authorities, using their

patronage to define a hierarchy of Indonesian artists.

FX Harsono continued to challenge the authoritarian power of the New Order through his performance and installation works. By engaging with social issues through the use of these alternative art forms, he presented an oppositional stance to the dominant forms of art-making and the cultural policies of the New Order. In 1987, he participated in an exhibition entitled *Pasaraya Dunia Fantasi* (Fantasy World Department Store). This exhibition expanded the understanding of art by examining the increasing diversity of cultural production – a trend arising from the rapid urbanisation of Indonesia's cities, accompanied by the flourishing of popular culture and urban sub-cultures. The exhibits, comprising store-front mannequins and images that drew heavily from the world of commerce and mass media, constituted yet another challenge to art academies like ASRI where

alternative art forms remained largely unacceptable. Harsono's other stridently critical performances and installations of ready-made objects, assembled with a rough and makeshift feel, also resisted the commercial galleries' commodification of art as an object.

At the same time, contemporary art in Indonesia gained momentum with the establishment of the Cemeti Gallery in 1988 (later renamed the Cemeti Art House in 1999). Founded by Nindityo Adipurnomo and Mella Jaarsma in Yogyakarta, the Cemeti Gallery promoted alternative art forms rejected by commercial galleries and official art institutions. In 1997, Cemeti organised an exhibition entitled *Slot in the Box* which addressed concerns over the electoral process in Indonesia. As part of *Slot in the Box*, FX Harsono presented a performance-installation titled *Destruction*, which critiqued the unchallenged power of the New Order and the lack of transparency

in the election process that favoured Suharto's regime.

The *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (GSRB) may have ceased its artistic activities in 1979 as the individual artists sought new directions in their own artistic practices, but its ideas marked a shift in how artists thought, and how they made art. Post-GSRB, critical attitudes towards the New Order regime and the institutional structures of the art world shaped by it prevailed. The struggle for the acceptance of contemporary idioms remained the focus throughout the 1990s, in the face of resistance from art institutions that championed the primacy of painting and sculpture. It is in this context that FX Harsono's practice in the 1990s may be understood as a critical stance, in his adoption of alternative forms of art-making as a vehicle for social critique.

Power and the Oppressed

1992
Installation
Dimensions variable
Artist collection

The chair, whether realised in the material form of a throne, or in the linguistic form, such as in the term 'chairman', can be seen as a symbol of power and authority. In *Power and the Oppressed*, a lone chair denotes authoritarian power, its lofty isolation

highlighted by a coil of barbed wire. The *keris* pinned on the wall behind the chair allude to the privileging of Javanese culture as Indonesia's national culture while suppressing other cultures during Suharto's regime. Symbolic of blood, red-



stained pieces of cloth are placed on piles of blackened earth arranged systematically in a grid pattern, in supplication to the chair's occupant. The grid-like order brings to mind the central government's obsession with order, in its bureaucratisation of all

political and societal organisations. The blood also reminds us of the violent repression of political opponents, particularly the anti-communist purge in 1966 that resulted in the deaths of an estimated half a million Indonesians.

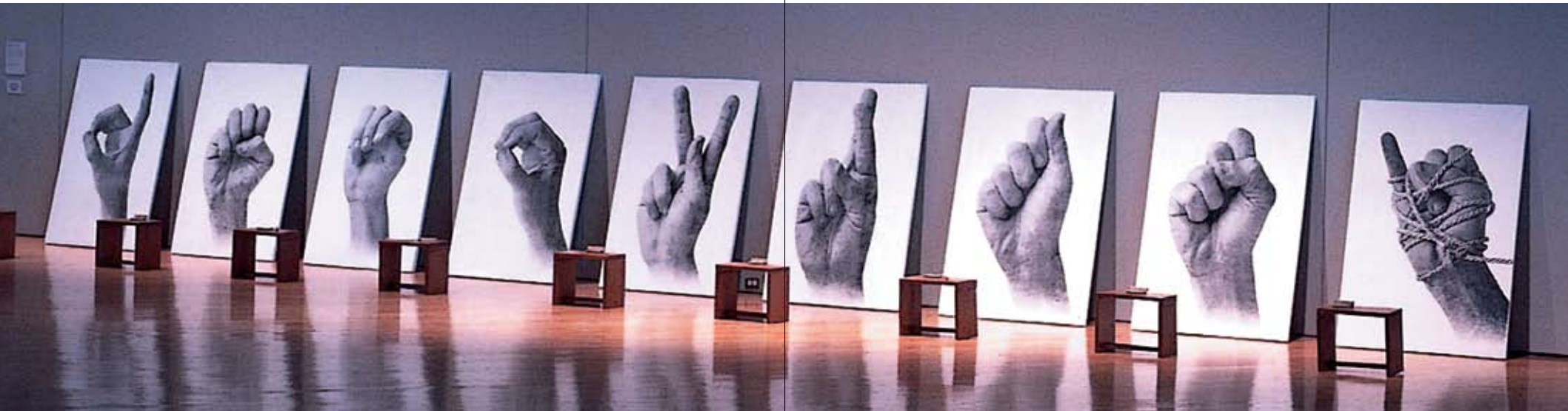
Voice Without Voice / Sign

1993 – 4

Silkscreen on canvas (9 panels), wooden stools and stamps

143.5 x 95.5 cm each panel

Fukuoka Asian Art Museum collection



Voice Without Voice / Sign comprises a row of panels, each imprinted with a gesturing hand. Collectively the various gestures spell out, in universal sign language, the letters D-E-M-O-K-R-A-S-I. The row of gesturing hands, and in particular the clenched fists that form the letters 'e', 'a' and 's' bring to mind the actions

that accompany public protests, which, together with the dramatic chiaroscuro, lend this work much of its forcefulness and urgency.

However, sign language is the recourse of the mute, and this work implies that the 'voice' of the people has been silenced. These

demonstrations for democracy are also futile; they exist only as gestures frozen on canvas panels, abstracted from the potent immediacy of actual action. To make this painfully clear, the last hand which forms the letter 'l' is bound with rope. While the work spells out uncompromisingly the demand for democracy, it is

also a sign of the impossibility or futility of political action. *Demokrasi* (democracy) exists only as a series of empty gestures; it is represented purely as a sign, an abstraction, rather than concrete reality.

The Voices Controlled by the Powers

1994

Installation with wooden masks and cloth

Dimensions variable

Artist collection



In this installation, wooden masks gaze voicelessly at a macabre centrepiece: their own severed mouths, naked evidence of their violent mutilation. These traditional *wayang* masks, or *topeng*, stand as a mournful testament to the situation of powerlessness; they symbolise each and every person who has been left voiceless without recourse

— a situation familiar to those Indonesians who lived under the New Order. *The Voices Controlled by the Powers* exemplifies FX Harsono's belief that art should make visible social problems in order to effect social change, and was made in response to the forced closure of *Tempo* magazine in 1994 for publishing an article exposing

the corruption of the New Order. In addition to contemporary political commentary, the work also laments the loss of traditional cultures of minority ethnic groups such as the Chinese, who were not allowed to practice their own culture: alongside other discriminatory laws, Chinese schools were banned and Indonesian

Chinese were made to change their Chinese names to more Indonesian-sounding ones. The severed traditional masks are metaphors for the forced erasure of the diverse cultural practices of different ethnic groups in Indonesia in the construction of a Javanese-based national culture.

Destruction

1997
Performance video
Artist collection

Destruction was Harsono's contribution to *Slot in the Box*, an exhibition organised by the Cemeti Gallery. *Slot in the Box* called together artists from across Indonesia to engage with the New Order's electoral fraud through such diverse forms as installation and performance art; other entries included Yustoni's *Open Your Freezer* and *Find New Clothes for the President*, which critiqued the foregone conclusion of

the Presidential elections, and Weye Haryanto's *Lip-Service Democracy*, which responded to Suharto's lip-service to democratic ideals in consistently engineering the victory of his *Golkar* Party (*Golongan Karya*).

Destruction was performed during the so-called 'silent week', a period prior to elections during which public assembly of more than five people was declared illegal; as such, Harsono's



performance placed him at personal risk of arrest. This performance saw Harsono assuming the role of the uncontrollably powerful Demon King Ravana, prime antagonist of the epic Sanskrit poem *The Ramayana*. Dressed in a business suit, Harsono set fire to three *wayang* masks on chairs, which represented the only three political parties Suharto allowed to contest the elections: his own *Golkar* Party, the Islamist United

Development Party (PPP), and the Democratic Party of Indonesia (PDI). Using a chainsaw too powerful for its task, Harsono destroyed the burnt chairs, as a metaphor for Suharto's brutal exercise of power over the electoral process. The mangled remains of the chairs and masks serve as an installation alongside a video of the performance; reminders that power should always be kept in check.

Burned Victims

1998

Performance video

Artist collection

Conceptualised as a performance-installation, the performance component of *Burned Victims* involved the burning of five wooden torsos, during which a placard was displayed to the audience, bearing the word *kerusuhan*, or 'riot'. In the work's installation component, the blackened remains of the wooden

torsos are suspended in oblong metal frames, arrangements of regular lines which highlight the agonised contortions of the torsos. Placed before each torso is a pair of burnt footwear, rendering the figures all the more forlorn. This performance-installation was made in response to a tragic episode of the May 1998



riots, during which the rioting mob stormed a shopping mall, sealed off its exits and set it on fire. The motives for such callous brutality remain unknown. Whatever the reasons, the hundreds of people who were trapped and burnt to death in the shopping mall were all victims of a power struggle that culminated in

the downfall of Suharto. In an almost photo-journalistic fashion, the artist presents to his audience the scorching image of the victims' bodies, to elicit horror and condemnation of civil violence.

Republik Indochoaos

1998

Photo-etching on paper (5 panels)

57 x 53 cm each

Singapore Art Museum collection



An ironic inversion of the commemorative function of postage stamps, *Republik Indochoaos* is the result of Harsono the individual electing to immortalise scenes of violence and death, as opposed to a state inscribing the memory of its own glory. A portrait of Suharto with the Bahasa Indonesia word *LENGSER* or 'stepping down' branded upon his

face confirms the status of the work as an incisive critique of the violence and destruction of the 1998 riots in Indonesia, which had as its root the failure of the political establishment. Images of soldiers taking aim at protestors, and buildings and motorcycles burning, confront us with the chaos brought upon by the inability of the government

to establish control and maintain security. An image of security personnel beating demonstrators with batons is accompanied by the following caption: *kekerasan tidak menyelesaikan masalah* (violence is not a solution). Rather than glorifying national achievements through stamps, Harsono has literally enshrined the memories of

the people who lived through the 1998 riots and experienced the traumatic events first-hand. *Republik Indochoaos* is a stark reminder never to forget; more importantly, never to repeat the uncontrolled escalation of violence that led to so many deaths.

Transitions: From the Subject of Politics to the Politics of the Subject

Towards the end of a tumultuous decade in Indonesia, marked by the Asian Financial Crisis, increasing protests and growing dissatisfaction, President Suharto declared his resignation on May 21 1998, bringing an end to a repressive political era. Indonesia entered into a period referred to as *Era Reformasi* (Reformation Era), which witnessed greater freedom of expression.

Yet for many artists such as Harsono, this gave rise to its own tensions as well. After decades 'fighting' against an oppressive regime, this liberalisation of politics and society presented artists with a new predicament of no longer

having a defined target or 'enemy' to critique in their art. Socially or politically-oriented art thus had to contend with this new vacuum. At the same time, there was growing disillusionment with the promises of *Reformasi* as it became increasingly evident that more freedom for society was not necessarily a good thing — Harsono for one, pilloried the apparent democratisation of the mass media in a work entitled *Blank Spot On My TV* (2003) which suggests that now that everyone and anyone has the opportunity to speak, a lot of what they have to say is often inconsequential, as evidenced by the endless sensationalism and drivel in the mass media.

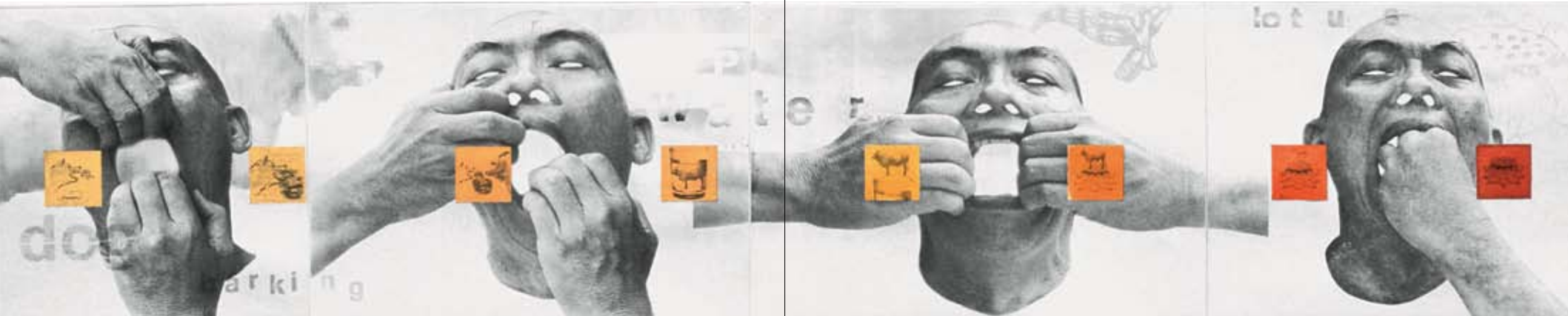
The May 1998 riots also left a bitter taste in the mouths of Chinese-Indonesian artists such as Harsono. Having previously put aside personal issues in favour of creating a socially-oriented art that fought for the masses, the scorching images of violence and brutality targeted at the Chinese community in Jakarta in 1998 must have left Harsono with a stinging sense of betrayal, and a profound loss of faith in the ideals and the *rakyat* (people) for whom he had previously fought.

The direction of Harsono's work began to change course, as did his choice of artistic materials and presentation. The majority of works in

his 2003 solo exhibition, *Displaced*, were photo-etchings and prints. In contrast to the strident social critique of his earlier work, Harsono's work during this period is much more enigmatic, often comprising a collage of fragmented images interspersed with symbols that appear personal or even arbitrary in nature. For the first time, Harsono begins to explore self-portraiture in his work. These representations of self take on new significance in a later series of works, where the personal is inextricably bound with the political.

Open Your Mouth

2002
Photo-etching on paper
57 x 219 cm
Artist collection



The *Reformasi* period in Indonesia saw the gradual expansion of civil liberties, such as the freedom of speech and dissent, a relaxation of censorship and the reclamation of public spaces.

The imagery of *Open Your Mouth* can be understood in the light of

these new developments, presenting us with an ambiguous metaphor for a newly liberalised society. It could well be that the hands forcing open the mouth of the person in the print are a symbol of this new openness, or that the hands belong to the man himself. Either way, the man depicted is — or feels — compelled to say

something; after all, Indonesians had been denied the right to free speech for so long under New Order — yet nothing comes out. What is there left to say that still makes sense, or which is meaningful? What does the freedom of speech amount to, if all which results are sound and fury, signifying nothing? The blank spaces

in his eyes, nostrils and gaping mouth suggest that his soul, or inner being, has vacated, and all that is left is an empty, hollow shell, reflecting the hollow victory of finally being able to express oneself now.

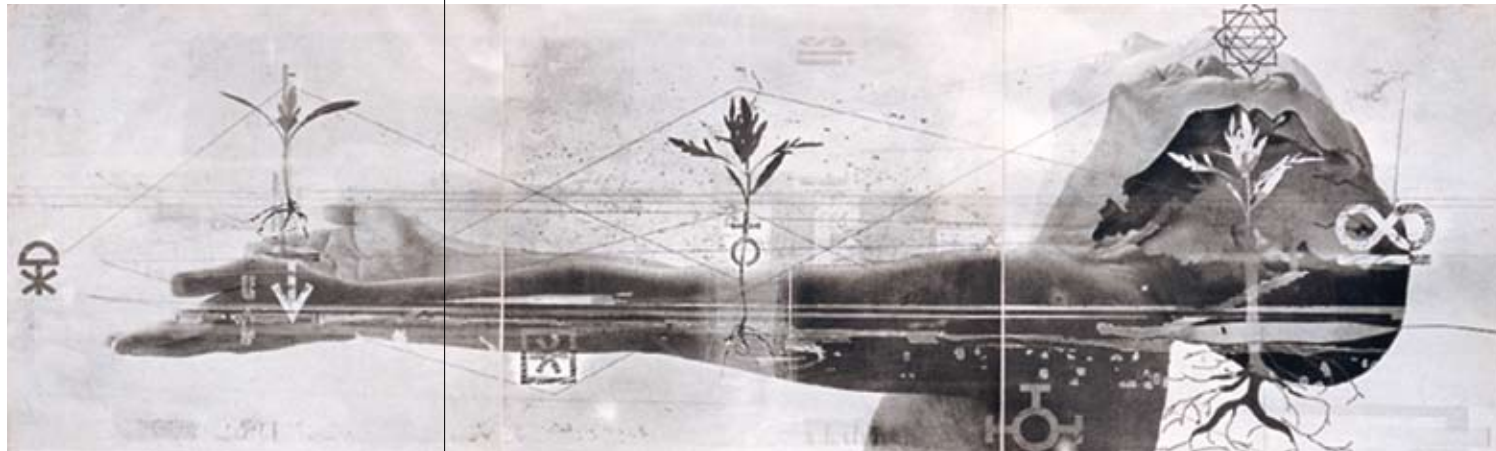
Tubuhku Adalah Lahan (My Body As A Field)

2002

Photo-etching on paper

57 x 126 cm

Artist collection



This horizontally-oriented print depicts the artist with his arms outstretched, almost in supplication, with his head tilted back. Sprouting from the length of his arms are budding plants, as well as a constellation of symbols. Some of these symbols are familiar: there is a downward-

pointing arrow, a symbol for infinity, and a symbol resembling a *mandala*; others are not easily identified. What they all add up to is ambiguous, as is the title of the work. Reinforcing this complexity is the fact that the depicted figure seems to be floating in an indeterminate or liminal space,

with no details in the background to convey a sense of context.

What does this portend? *My Body As A Field* suggests that the site of signification has shifted to Harsono's own body, away from the public and political spheres that previously

dominated his works. The artist's body is represented as fertile ground for new significations and multiple, open-ended interpretations — perhaps itself a metaphor for the new openness of the *Era Reformasi*, and its uncharted, unfamiliar currents.

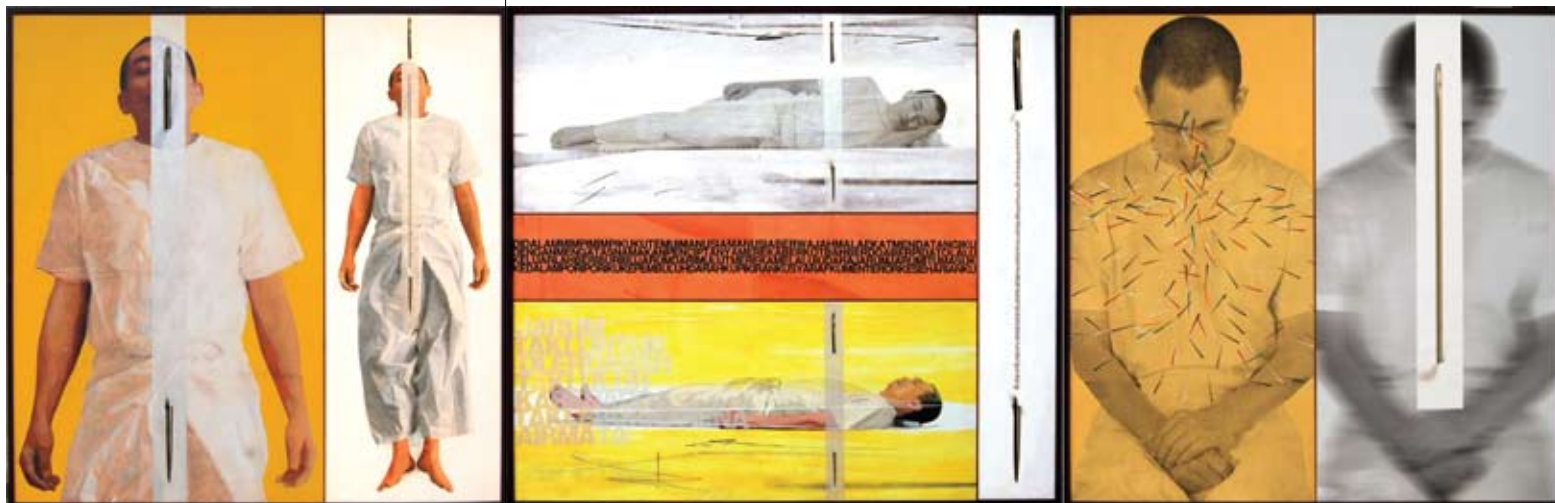
Needle In My Consciousness

2003

Screenprint on canvas, digital photo on photo paper

160 x 400 cm

Private collection



Marking Harsono's first exploration of the needle as a metaphor for the expression of unspoken pains, *Needle in My Consciousness* was made in response to the bombing of Jakarta's JW Marriott Hotel. The needle of pain, in this case, is the ever-present, nebulous threat posed to the individual by violent currents within society; the niggling, uneasy

sense that one is never truly safe, that at any moment forces beyond an individual's control may strike one down, in physical and other senses. For Harsono, this applies not only to the rise of violent fundamentalism, but other, less visible forms of prejudice which pervade society. One such example, drawn from Harsono's personal experience, would be the

discrimination against the Chinese in Indonesia, which was a matter of state policy during the New Order.

The work itself presents a tableau of Harsono in a number of attitudes, each overlaid with one or more needles, as if piercing him: the repose of death, meditative concentration, the *Sleeping Buddha*. Each panel

presents him in relation to fields of mostly pure colour, allowing us to focus on the elements in play — himself, the needle and the tale of the needle which carries over from the world of dreams to the waking world.

Kuteropong (Watching The Wound)

2007

Diptych, acrylic on canvas

180 x 180 cm each

Private collection



From behind his hands, cupped to resemble a pair of binoculars, Harsono surveys what lies beyond — the viewer, or perhaps, the butterfly pierced by a needle and set aflame. The imagery in this diptych conflates a number of motifs employed by the artist in his work of the 2000s: the needle, as an insidious threat and metaphor for pain; the butterfly, as victim; fire, as a metaphor for violence and destruction; and finally, the erasure of the subject or self, to

reflect uncertainty about identity and shifting positions.

This work is Harsono's introspection of his efforts as an artist, who was mostly preoccupied with social issues. Made when he was intensely questioning his self-identity, attempting to reassure himself that within the 'personal' there remains a social dimension, the artist nonetheless continues to harbour doubts, questioning how close or how

far the personal is from the social or the political.

Harsono thus began to gauge the issue through reading books, seeking relevant references to ascertain the proximity and distance between these two seemingly paradoxical fields. Right before his face, a dead butterfly pierced by a large needle emerges, a metaphor emphasising the fragility of the victim, the very subject that has delivered him to

the domain of self-identity and its contexts of power. Is speaking of the victim a personal or social subject? The difficulty in answering this question is hinted at by the doubled image of the diptych, which brings to mind the technique of stereography, in which viewing two images at slightly different angles generates the illusion of depth.

Thousand Times Pain

2007

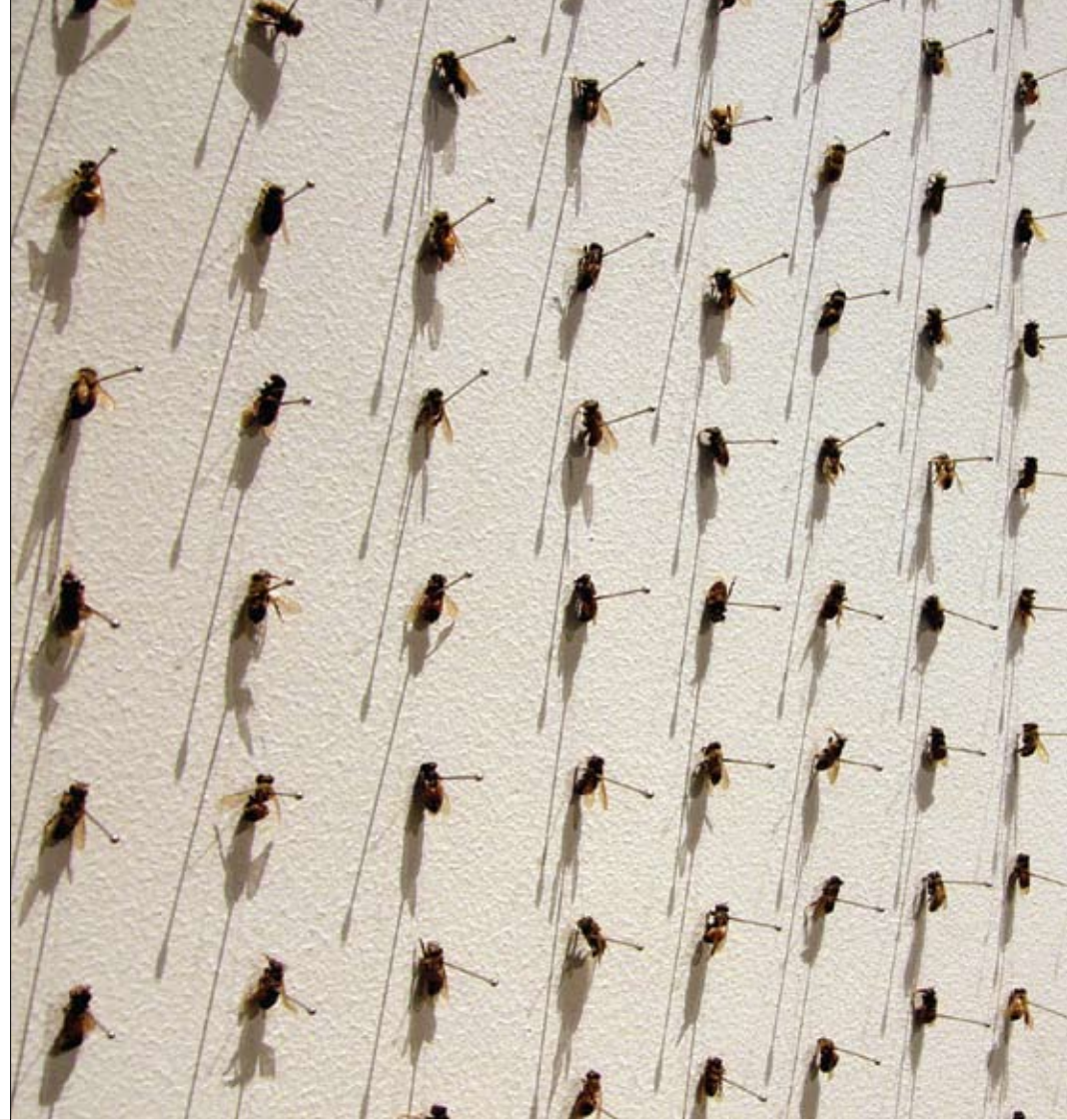
Installation with bees and needles

Dimensions variable

Artist collection

A recurrent motif in Harsono's recent body of works is that of the needle, which the artist likens to a tiny 'point' of pain. While the pain caused by the fine point of a needle is slight, subtle when compared to the brutality and

forceful violence suggested by the charred and dismembered human figures of earlier works, the pain is, nonetheless, palpable. Repeated, these 'points of pain' accumulate to slowly wear down their victims by a



gradual process of attrition. This is conveyed through the installation *Thousand Times Pain*, where a thousand bees are pinned to the wall with needles. Individually, they appear insignificant; their pain passes us by,

insidious in its subtlety. Amassed into a grid, where the subtle violence is repeated a thousand times over, they convey the haplessness of victims in a potent symphony of subtle agony.

Bon Appetit

2008

Installation with table, cloth, chairs, tableware, needles and butterflies

Dimensions variable

Artist collection

In this installation, a table is laid for a meal, the cutlery and chinaware meticulously arranged according to the table etiquette of the elite, anticipating the arrival of diners possessing social status and privilege. Startlingly, the bowls and plates are filled not with food but

with butterflies, neatly fastened to the chinaware. Much of Harsono's recent work has employed the butterfly as a symbol of a victim — beautiful and vulnerable, and inevitably, destined for destruction or attack. The butterflies in *Bon Appetit* are forcibly pinned down, about



to be consumed. While the work appears charming on the surface, it nonetheless hints at unequal power relations in society, and the relationship between the powerful and the powerless. The suggestion of a domestic or interior setting also marks a shift from Harsono's

earlier works, where the streets and public areas were the theatres of violence, and sites of protest and resistance. Now, as *Bon Appetit* suggests, violence and danger have subtly infiltrated the home, the most personal and private of spaces.

Preserving Life, Terminating Life #1

2009
Dptych, acrylic and oil on canvas, thread
200 x 350 cm
Artist collection



The images in these two canvases are drawn from the same source — old albums of black and white photographs that Harsono discovered in his family home, and which subsequently inspired his most recent body of work, which investigates personal — as well as political — history.

In these two paintings, images of Harsono's family members are juxtaposed with images documenting the exhumation of the mass graves of Chinese murdered in the turbulent years after the Second World

War. This juxtaposition poignantly highlights the preciousness and precariousness of life — the lives of those members of the Chinese community and Harsono's family who were lucky to escape the violence, and the lives of generations to come, as intimated by the marriage portrait of the couple in the first painting, and the family portrait in the second painting, where the visibly pregnant mother reclines in the background, and the father hovers protectively over his firstborn in the foreground.

Preserving Life, Terminating Life #2

2009
Dptych, acrylic and oil on canvas, thread
200 x 350 cm
Artist collection



Binding these two disparate halves — family life and cause for celebration on the one hand, murder and death on the other — is a string of words echoing the titles of the works, stitched into the canvases with red thread. For the Chinese, red thread is associated with occasions both auspicious and inauspicious. At weddings and other celebrations, red clothing is worn as a celebratory gesture; at funerals, pieces of red thread are given to guests to bring home when they leave the place of mourning, as a symbol of blessing to ward against unhappy spirits. It

is therefore apt that Harsono has chosen to bind the two halves of his canvases with a line of words stitched with red thread — the visual motif of the red line simultaneously suggesting lineage and blood ties, as well as the continuous line of history, all too often stained by bloodshed and violence.

nDudah

2009

Documentary video

21:20 mins

Artist collection



nDudah is Javanese slang that means 'once again taking something apart, or digging something up'. Harsono heard this word spoken by the villagers around the town of Blitar, where he was born, during a survey he conducted in August 2009. The villagers he met still remember digging up the victims — mostly ethnic Chinese — of a massacre that has not been (and may never be) included in the official history of Indonesia.

Harsono's survey concerned the massacre of ethnic Chinese that had occurred in Blitar and its environs from 1947 to 1948, when the Dutch attempted to retake the newly

independent nation by force. To defend against these incursions, the Republic's administration attempted to employ a 'scorched earth' strategy, leaving barren and empty those cities which the Dutch would attempt to occupy. In the chaos resulting from forced evacuation, there were a number of killings and robberies of the ethnic Chinese, which may have been exacerbated by the military's conscription of the inmates of Kalisosokpenitentiary, who were given weapons and instructions to empty the city.

Harsono's investigations began with a series of black and white photographs taken by his photographer-father in

1951, when the latter worked with the Chinese organisation Chung Hua Tsung Hui in an attempt to recognise the victims, trace their origins and family, and then give their remains a proper burial in one place, now named '*Bong Belung*', ('Bone Grave'). The number of victims found was 191.

The *nDudah* video documentary project was conducted by Harsono by interviewing still-living eye-witnesses, the families of the victims, and survivors of the massacre. He also consulted a book which chronicled the history of the massacre, titled '*Tionghoa dalam Pusaran Politik: Mengungkap*

Fakta Sejarah Tersembunyi Orang Tionghoa di Indonesia' ('The Chinese In The Political Vortex: Disclosing The Hidden Facts Of History About The Chinese In Indonesia'). He then arranged the outcome of the interviews, testimonies and his father's photographs into a documentary video. *nDudah* is hence a significant work that chronicles and bears witness to an unspoken chapter of Indonesian history, and the problems of the position of the Chinese diaspora in Indonesia that persist till today.

Rewriting The Erased

2009

Installation and performance video

Artist collection

In a darkened room, FX Harsono sits at a table with paper, ink, and a brush. Slowly he begins to write his name in Chinese, character by character. He repeats this, placing each sheet of paper with the three Chinese characters on the floor, and starts to write on the next sheet, until the entire floor is papered over with his name.

In this poignant and meditative performance, the artist seeks to remember — reclaim — that which has been lost or erased. Being of

Chinese descent in Indonesia meant that Harsono, like many others, was cut off from his Chinese 'roots' and culture through a series of government policies aimed at fully assimilating Chinese immigrants into Indonesian society. These measures, implemented during Suharto's New Order regime, included requiring all Chinese to change their names to Indonesian-sounding ones, as well as the closure of Chinese schools, press and organisations. The end of Suharto's New Order in 1998 witnessed a lifting of these

restrictions, and the Chinese were once again able to use their original names.

During this time, Harsono began to question the seemingly conflicting facets of his identity: Indonesian, Chinese and Catholic. For most of his life, he had to practise a 'politics of denial' in order to feel that he belonged somewhere, and this meant the suppression of his 'Chinese' identity. Now that he is free to reconnect with this forgotten, or repressed, aspect of himself, he

seems to question, through this work, if that past still holds any significance for him, or is it, when revisited, simply a series of empty and meaningless gestures, taking shape as ideographs from a language and culture that Harsono can only half-understand? The gestures of the artist are filled with both pathos and power, as he attempts to reclaim a past that is at once intensely personal as it is politically inflected.



Programmes in conjunction with the exhibition

Meet the Artist: FX Harsono

One of Indonesia's foremost contemporary artists, FX Harsono will be turning 60 this year. In this talk, he will discuss from the artist's perspective the major movements and periods in Indonesian contemporary art, starting from the seminal *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (New Art Movement), to the emergence of pluralism today in terms of the diversity of styles and the wide range of artist initiatives.

Date : Thu, 4 Mar 10
Time : 7:30pm — 9pm
Venue : SAM Auditorium
Fees : Free. Registration required.

Special Tour: Anecdotes from a friend of FX Harsono

Get up close and personal with a friend of artist FX Harsono — Mr. Hendro Wiyanto. Hear stories about the artist and the inspirations behind Harsono's iconic works. With personal anecdotes and observations of the artist by Mr. Wiyanto, learn more about the life story of one of Indonesia's foremost contemporary artists.

Date : Fri, 5 Mar 10
Time : 7:30pm — 8:30pm
Venue : SAM Lobby
Fees : Free. Registration Required.

Special Tour: Tides of Change in the art of FX Harsono

Join Curator, Ms. Tan Siu Li and journey to a pivotal point in Indonesian contemporary art history which also marks the beginning of Harsono's artistic career. Harsono's work is often charged with a sense of urgency and revolutionary fervour. His work offers a social critique and commentary of the political landscape of Indonesia. This tour surveys the artist's response to political developments in his country.

Date : Fri, 12 Mar 10
Time : 7:30pm — 8:30pm
Venue : SAM Lobby
Fees : Free. Registration Required.

Special Tour: Art as protest — the art of FX Harsono

Join Curator, Mr. Seng Yu Jin as he examines the role of FX Harsono as a social activist. With a belief in the potential of art to address injustices in society, Harsono's works seek to bring to light the horrors of social injustice and discrimination among other social concerns. Just as the face and method of oppression and violence has evolved over time, so has the strategies of representation.

Date : Fri, 19 Mar 10
Time : 7:30pm — 8:30pm
Venue : SAM Lobby
Fees : Free. Registration Required.