

## AGUS SUWAGE

Agus Suwage is one of only a few Indonesian artists who practise drawing as a means of expression. Although a number of his works are paintings, traces of drawing can always be seen in them. In his installations, too, spontaneous drawn lines are evident. Many of his works are carried out in charcoal, watercolour, tempera, acrylic and collage.

Nearly all Suwage's works begin as charcoal sketch. The spontaneous sketch that shapes his drawing does not follow the 'sketch-making' tradition, but is more the result of aimless doodling, which he does almost continually. Initially, he himself doesn't know which sketches he will develop into a finished piece. Various aesthetic considerations culled from his studies in Graphic Design in the Faculty of Design and Fine Art at the Bandung Institute of Technology decide the fate of his sketches in the end.

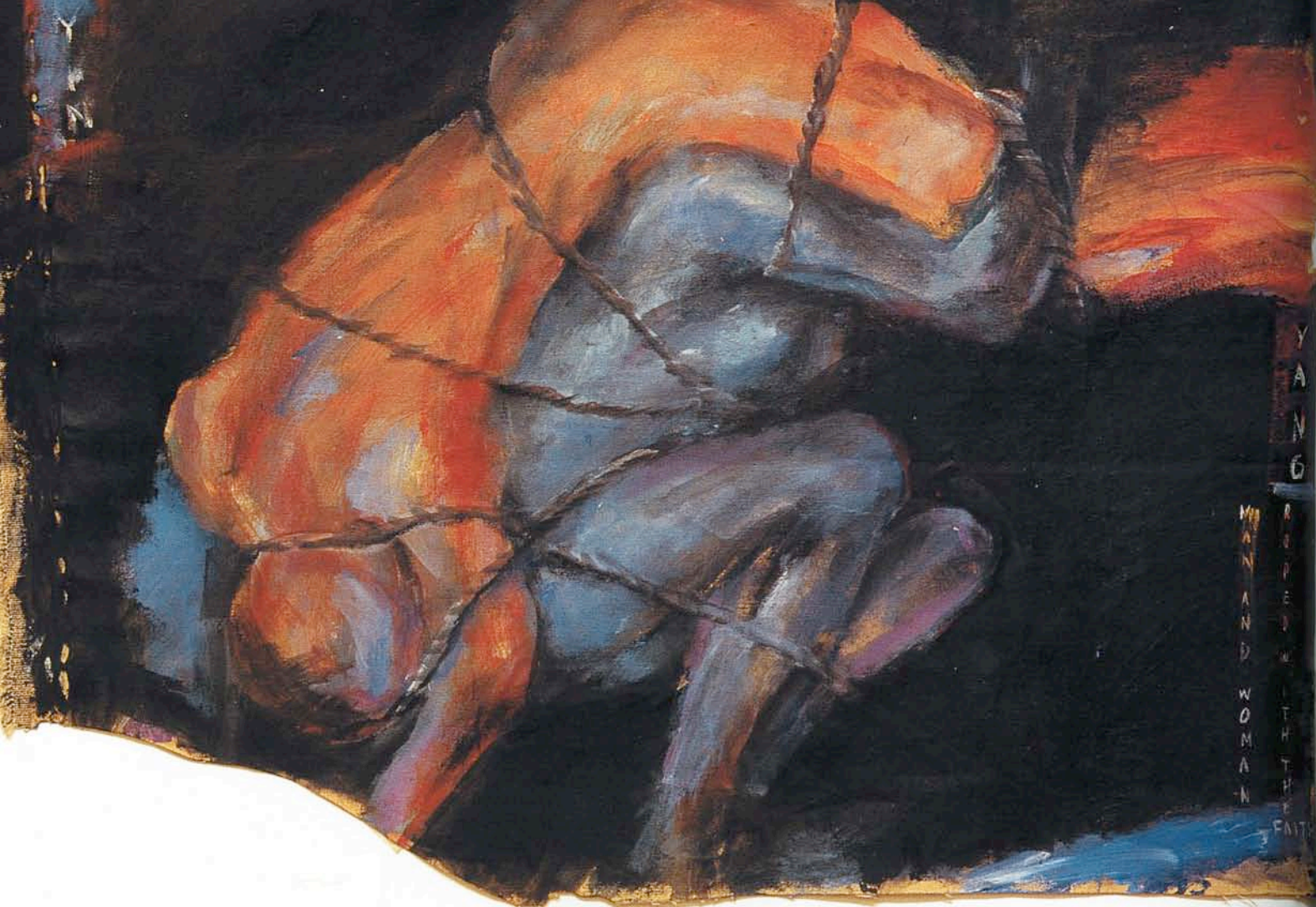
Suwage's sketches indicate that his work is drawn from everyday life. The day-to-day reality that attracts his attention is connected with the darker side of life. His art reflects highly personal and unpleasant experiences in conflicts between individual values and communal values. Thus his work revolves around feelings of anxiety, fear, suppression, acceptance, and a spirit of opposition, which he terms "a kind of madness."

These unpleasant experiences, in Suwage's perception, begin with the tension of living in society. "The reality is society," he says. "In that reality, people put pressure on one another. People threaten people just like animals threaten other animals." He frequently depicts these pressures as communal, even moral, values. In his painting entitled YIN AND YANG, 1989, he turns this philosophy of balance on its head. The Yin and Yang symbols are shown as two human figures tied together, pressed up against one another with almost no room to move. One of the figures, a woman, supports the other body, which resembles a corpse. This painting speaks clearly of Suwage's scepticism about the existence of balance in life.

Suwage's works take critical issue with community life, but they don't comment on social tensions, nor do they fall under any political school of thought. The imbalance in society in Suwage's works appears rather to be beyond human control. "There are all kinds of forces that coerce us, which cannot be opposed, and which leave us with no choice," he says. "Those forces aren't necessarily evil, but the reality is that they bind us, hurt us, and make us afraid."

The closest one can get to understanding Suwage's art is by a psychological analysis of human introversion: an inner world where a collective unconscious exists, which is repressed because it does not agree with society's norms. In theory, human behaviour should be a balance between extroversion and introversion. In reality, however, the need for survival results in a pronounced disregard of introversion. The existence of collective unconsciousness is, in fact, ignored, or made taboo. In the





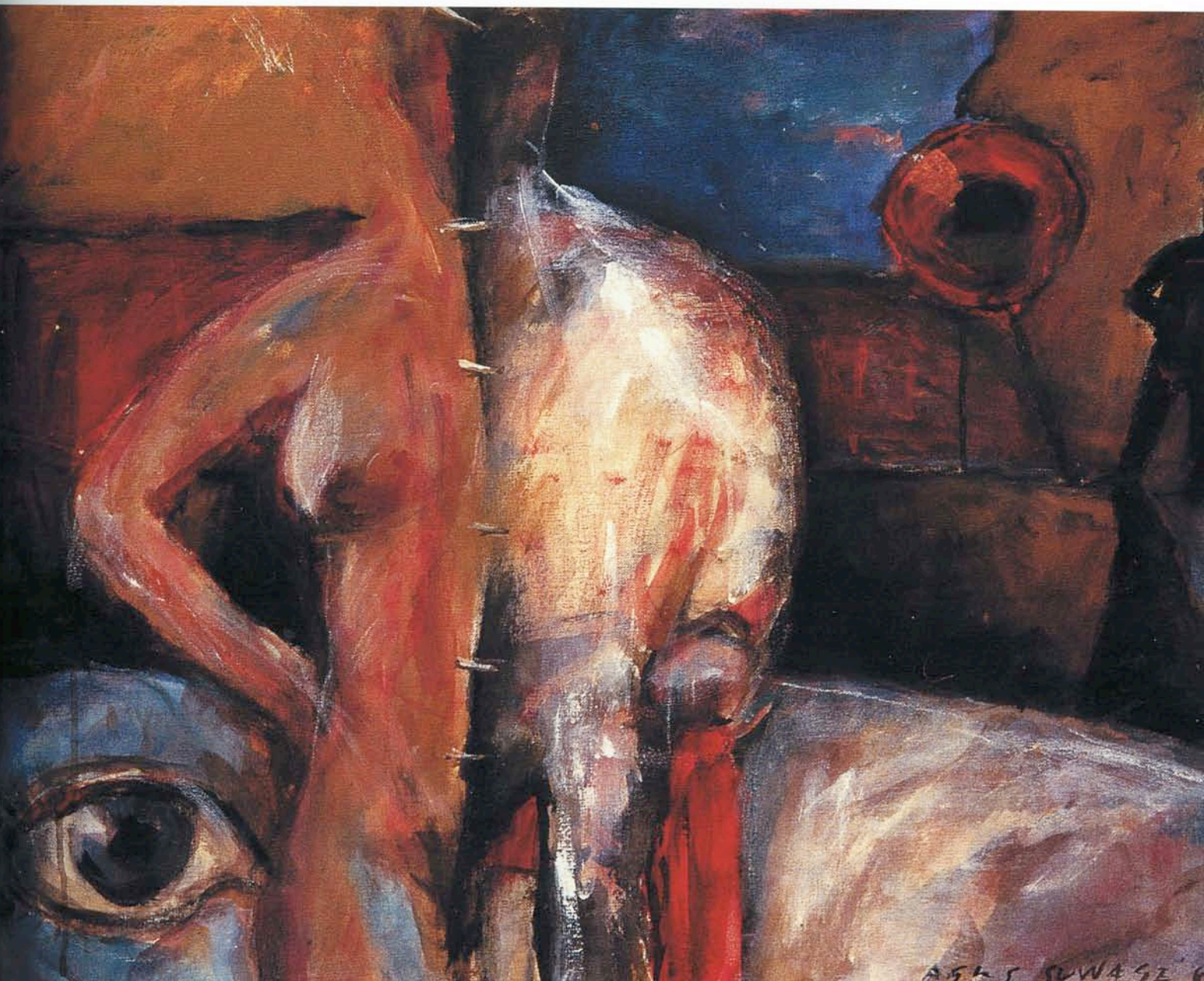
YANG  
6  
MARRIED WITH THE FAITH  
AND WOMAN



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**BELOW:** WOMAN AND MAN, 1989, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 75 X 100 CM.  
**OPPOSITE, TOP:** YIN YANG, 1989, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 75 X 100 CM.  
**OPPOSITE, BELOW:** BURIED COUPLE, 1989, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS,  
75 X 100 CM.





## BIOGRAPHY

Born 1959 in Purworejo, Indonesia, studied at the Faculty of Fine Art and Design, Bandung Institute of Technology, Bandung, Indonesia

### Major Exhibitions:

- 1991 Group exhibition, Gallery Yasri, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 1993 Group exhibition, Gallery Coninck, Amersfoort, Netherlands;  
Ninth Jakarta Art Biennial, Taman Ismail Marzuki Centre, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 1994 5+5 Indonesia-Netherlands, Erasmuis Huis, Jakarta, Indonesia

individual, this imbalance can cause a kind of collision, which later surfaces as impulsive behaviour. To convey this message, Suwage frequently uses myths, which signify the strength of the collective consciousness and, from another angle, indicate a society's degree of unconsciousness.

Another theme in Suwage's art that is closely related to the collective unconsciousness, is sex. These paintings frequently have a dark mood, and are dominated by the colour red. His work entitled *WOMAN AND MAN*, 1985, shows the image of a nude man and woman standing side-by-side. Their pose, which at a glance suggests intimacy, depicts sexual desire and troubling sensuality. The whiteness of the woman's body contrasts strongly with the painting's dark atmosphere. This focus of interest, however, clashes vividly with images of several red balls, suggesting breasts on the one hand and on the other, organic, red protuberances. Sexuality in this painting is fraught with conflict.

Another painting with the same title, *WOMAN AND MAN*, 1989, clearly shows the outlines of the nude woman's torso in one half of the work. In the other half, executed in black and other dark colours, her form is obscured. In her stead there appears an angry, gleaming red eye, whilst in the bright section, the woman is shown clutching a knife. The silhouette of the man is depicted in the distance, with eyeballs resembling black balls.

In a series of paintings entitled *BURIED COUPLE*, 1989-90, Suwage focuses on the tension between intimacy and betrayal which he associates with death. In his work, burial - the image of an open grave, which occasionally emits flames - symbolises the relationship between man and woman.

The lines and brush strokes in Suwage's paintings, which at first glance appear to be expressive, do not express emotion, but meaning. With lines that do not converge to a clear image, he censors, much as the collective consciousness puts pressure on various impulsive urges. With these lines, however, he also builds a negative image of a reality which, in his view, brings unpleasant experience.

In *PRIMEVAL INSTINCT*, 1985, and *BACCHANALIA*, 1985, these lines form images that come together in a chaotic fashion. Images of sadism, insanity, and bestiality are vaguely evident, and they become dramatic because they are conveyed with line, colour, and rough, indistinct scratchings. Strangely, this collection of dark images radiates an artistic enchantment as well.





ABOVE LEFT: PRIMEVAL INSTINCT  
III, 1992, INK ON PAPER, 32 X 32  
CM. LEFT: PRIMEVAL INSTINCT IV,  
1992, INK ON PAPER, 32 X 32 CM.



**RIGHT:** WOMAN AND MAN, 1985, CHARCOAL AND GOUACHE ON PAPER, 55 X 79 CM. **BELOW:** PRIMEVAL INSTINCT I, 1992, INK ON PAPER, 32 X 32 CM.





