

**THE FIRST**

**ASIA-PACIFIC**

**OF CONTEMPORARY ART**

**TRIENNIAL**

**BRISBANE AUSTRALIA 1993**

**QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY**

## FX HARSONO

FX Harsono was born in 1949 in Blitar, Java, Indonesia. After an education in Catholic schools, in 1969 he entered the Indonesian Academy of Art in Yogyakarta, majoring in painting. A number of exhibitions organised with other young artists in 1973–74 helped to establish his reputation. Invited to participate in 1974 in the 'National Biennale', Jakarta, Harsono was among other young Yogyakarta artists who criticised the dominance of the decorative style among established Indonesian artists, particularly through a declaration entitled 'Black December Statement'. As the confrontation deepened, Harsono and others formed the Indonesian New Art Movement in 1975. In a number of exhibitions organised through the movement in 1975–79, his geometrical paintings developed into three-dimensional works and began to express social issues.

In 1979 he moved to Jakarta where he continued as an art activist. He worked as a graphic designer at advertising agencies, established his own design company in 1984, and in 1987–88 studied at the Jakarta Institute of the Arts, specialising in painting. His only solo exhibition to date, 'The Social Change', was held at the Institute in 1988. Though he is known primarily as a graphic designer, Harsono has continued his involvement with art, joining experimental exhibitions and helping in 1990 to establish a quarterly art journal, *Art Dialogue*. Among the group exhibitions he has been represented in over the last decade are 'The Process of 1985', Ancol Gallery, Jakarta; 'Fantasy World in Supermarket', Ismail Marzuki Cultural Center, Jakarta, 1987; and the 'Artists Regional Exchange 1992', in Perth, Australia.

FX Harsono's works usually start from a theme such as urban and environmental issues, and are categorised broadly as installations. At first, he created reliefs by using constructed papers on the canvas, and a geometrical space composition done in 1974 used iron rods and panels. The movement towards three-dimensional work was further reinforced when he joined the Indonesian New Art Movement in 1975. In *Top 1975*, he uses ready-mades of a cage (wood and iron bars) and a machine gun toy to protest power and domination.

His works between 1975 and 1979 should be seen in the context of the Indonesian New Art Movement itself. In part a confrontation between younger and more established artists, the movement used ready-mades

### Power and oppression

Installation  
Shown at 'Artists  
Regional Exchange  
1992', Perth



and installations to protest the domination of painting within modern Indonesian art development. Harsono was among those artists who developed the movement's parodies into serious works of art. In *The children's games*, he experiments with the use of local materials, using bamboo construction and children's traditional toys made from wood, bamboo and leaves.

Environmental issues became a major focus of his work in the 1980s. An installation made in 1983 on a beach near Yogyakarta consisted of fifty panels forming a fence along the beach, some of them bearing environmental messages. A serial work of 1984–85, 'The destruction of Indonesian forests', also explored environmental issues. Visual aspects in Harsono's works are typically less important than theme and content. Though critics have sometimes labelled his works as propaganda, he strongly believes that a work of art should express social problems.

His solo exhibition of 1988, 'The Social Change', showed installations consisting of 150-centimetre high printed panels bearing enlarged photographs of peasants, trees and

factories; a television monitor, newspapers and a light box projecting advertising images; torn cloth, plastic sheets and photographs of people sitting in frustration. Through this work Harsono criticised the development of multinational industries in Indonesia which he believes have brought destruction to many rural areas and much human suffering.

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