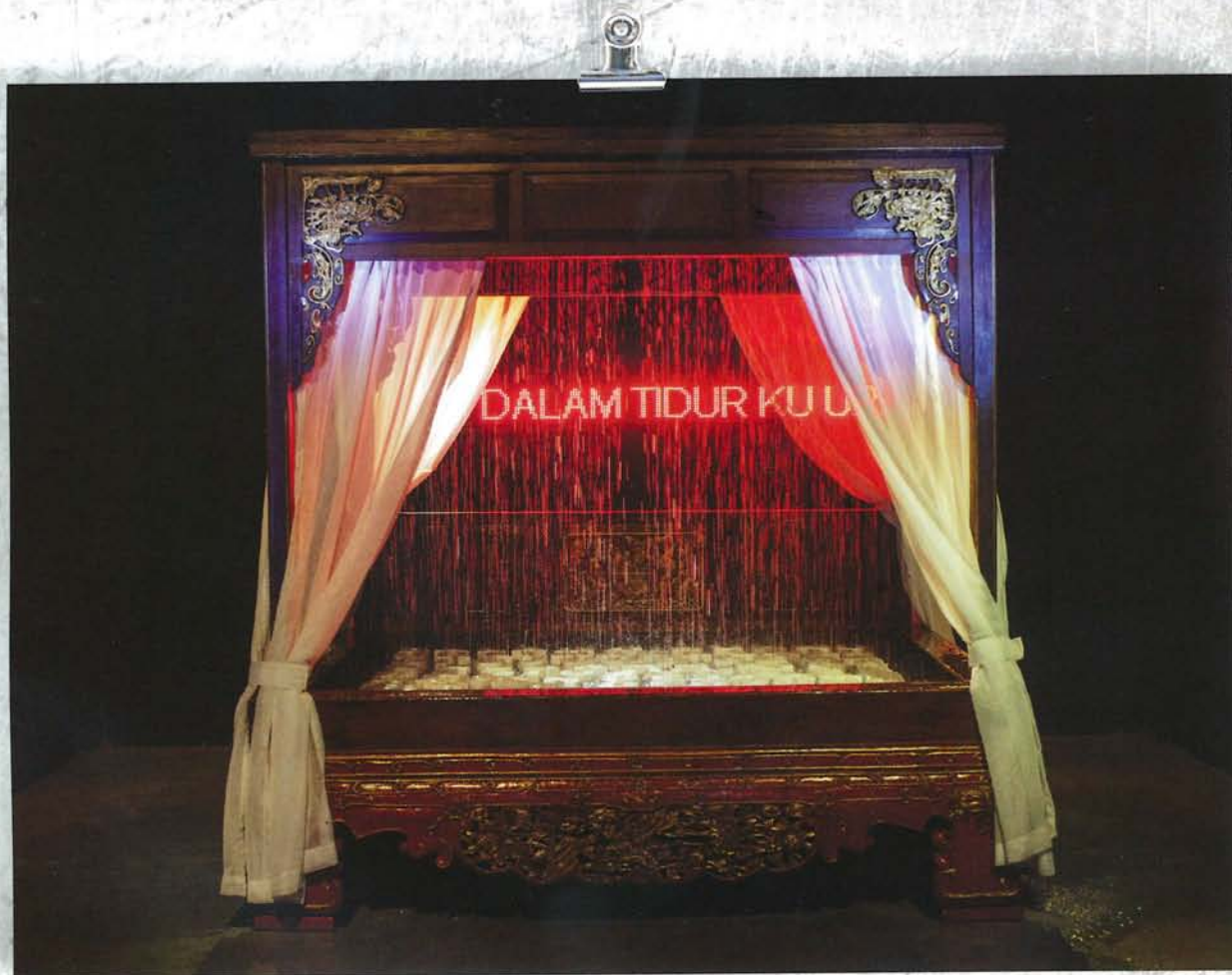


# FX HARSONO

FX HARSONO, *The Raining Bed*, 2013, poem in ceramic letters on traditional Peranakan bed with water and running LED text in Indonesian and English, 200 x 200 x 200 cm. Courtesy the artist.



In 1972, Documenta 5 was heralded as the institutional embrace of conceptual art in Europe. At nearly the same time, in Indonesia, a generation of artists living through massive societal unrest—without any access to the European avant-garde on the other side of the world—abandoned modes of abstraction and expressionism to respond to the political events of the day. Among them was FX Harsono, who was so disturbed by the anti-Chinese campaigns and the crackdowns on student protests that, in 1974, he and 12 other students signed the so-called Black December Manifesto, stating that an artist's responsibility is "to offer a spiritual direction based on humanitarian values and oriented towards social, cultural and economic realities." It wasn't until the 1990s, when Indonesian artists were able to travel abroad, that they gained exposure to the world of contemporary art, and with it a belated recognition of Indonesia's sui-generis avant-garde.

In the 1990s, Harsono grappled with the societal strictures imposed by Suharto's military junta in works such as *The Voices*

*Controlled by the Powers* (1994), an arrangement of Javanese *panji* masks (used in dance performances) sawed in half, and his performance at the Cemeti Art House in Yogyakarta, *Korban* (*Burned Victims*) (1998), following the massacres of more than 1,100 people in anti-Chinese riots. In the 2000s, he embarked on "Pilgrimage," an extensive research project into the mass graves from massacres in 1947–48 of Indonesia's long-persecuted Chinese minority, of which he is a member. His latest sculptural installations exploring the precarious history of Chinese-Indonesians was the focus of new works in "What We Have Here Perceived as Truth, We Shall Some Day Encounter as Beauty," at the Jogja National Museum in 2013. In 2014, Harsono was named a Prince Claus Fund Laureate, and for 2015, he plans to continue his "Pilgrimage" research and other writing projects. *HGM*

See our website for Arabic and Chinese versions of this article.

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