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Leonor Veiga

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The Third Avant-garde:

Messages of Discontent

LEONOR VEIGA

Is it possible to define an avant-garde for Southeast Asia? If so, what are its specific traits and how did it emerge? In this article, I propose that Southeast Asian artists have established an avant-garde that I term “Third Avant-garde”. Works that I characterise as Third Avant-garde have, as their most striking feature, the presence of fragments of tradition. This presence of traditional fragments may be experienced as anachronic, because it provokes an oscillation between different temporalities: past and present, traditional and modern. The Third Avant-garde refers to practices which emerged most notably in the 1990s, although its roots date from the mid-1970s.¹ This was a time when notions of a “Third Space” were primal, indicating a possibility of residing in the interstices between two places, such as art and ethnography. My concept of the Third Avant-garde, however, does not indicate solely a negotiation between these two realms. Instead, the Third Avant-garde is proposed as a locus for contesting the taxonomical system that divides fine arts and culture. Among other things, the emergence of artistic practices of the kind that I term Third Avant-garde has also provoked western ethnographic museums to rebrand themselves as world art museums.² This change is significant; it enables practices that have historically been refused the status

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FIGURE 1: FX Harsono, *The Voices are Controlled by the Powers*, 2011 (artist's reconstruction from the 1994 original). Mixed media (wooden masks and cloth), 30 × 350 × 350 cm. Image courtesy of the artist

of art to be included in its realm. Yet, this article is not primarily concerned with the discomfiting consequences the Third Avant-garde has created for institutions, but rather with the definition of these practices.

The terminology of the Third Avant-garde does not allude to an avant-garde from the “Third World”, which is now an outdated nomenclature; instead, it refers to certain contemporary art practices which incorporate the criteria defined by Australian art historian Terry Smith.³ First, these practices meet the criterion of being contemporaneous, that is, produced since the 1980s, up until our time.⁴ Second, for their contemporaneousness, which relates to the idea that art has become an expanded space of enquiry, penetrating several spheres of life (including national identity, tradition and ethnicity and their impact on society, religion and spirituality, as well as gender issues, and preoccupations of political, social and environmental nature). Third, contemporary art is defined through its co-temporality, manifest in “the coexistence of distinct temporalities, of different ways of *being* in relation to time”.⁵ From these three general aspects, the latter relates to what I will discuss as the “unorthodox materiality” of the proposed Third Avant-garde, because of its relation to traditional arts.

In art historical terms, Third Avant-garde works have often been framed as political art. One example is Indonesian artist FX Harsono's *The Voices are Controlled by the Powers* (1994) (Figure 1), as it has been discussed by

Australian art historians Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio. Chiu and Genocchio focused on the contextual conditions of production in which the work originated.⁶ Even if theirs is a plausible analysis, if the interpretive gaze is shifted towards the materiality of the artwork, then the presence of fragments of traditional arts becomes the work's pre-eminent attribute. While Harsono's deliberate dissection of 100 Panji masks served to deliver a political message against an atmosphere of censorship, in the work he also addresses the dominance of Javanese culture in Suharto's nationalist New Order (1967–98) project.

The phenomenon of the Third Avant-garde took place in Southeast Asia, emerging concurrently with the increasing presence of Southeast Asian artists in international exhibitions, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.⁷ The exhibition of these contemporary practices "in exile", as Indonesian curator Jim Supangkat puts it, has led to mixed interpretations.⁸ This circumstance was famously addressed in the seminal exhibition *Traditions/Tensions*, held at the Asia Society in New York in 1996, and has been reassessed in recent writings by Filipino art historian Patrick D. Flores and Australian art historian Pat Hoffie.⁹ The Asia Society director at the time, Vishakha N. Desai, affirmed that *Traditions/Tensions* aimed to demonstrate how "these highly dissimilar elements [traditional and ultramodern forms] stimulate startling new expressions".¹⁰ The show, curated by Thai art historian Apinan Poshyananda, demonstrated that tradition should not be opposed to modernity, but rather that tradition offers inspiration for creative acts. It targeted overly simplistic dichotomies such as East and West, traditional and modern, centre and periphery.

I believe that many of the works exhibited in *Traditions/Tensions* display the avant-gardist stance that Indian curator Geeta Kapur announced in the exhibition's catalogue as the mission of what I term the Third Avant-garde: art practices that could perform a double-dismantle against national conservative forces that held firm to imported notions of high and low art, while disputing western art's supremacy.¹¹ Yet at the time of their initial exhibition, these works that I came to term Third Avant-garde were not immediately identified as such. This circumstance results from the fact that the majority of exhibitions before *Traditions/Tensions* in the West were developed by Western curators who maintained "preconceived notion[s] of exotica ... and [a] desire to rescue authenticity".¹² If contemporary manifestations were presented, they would be introduced through the perspectives of western anthropology or notions of cultural purity.¹³ As a result, western audiences, particularly the American one, remained unprepared for the varieties of the "politically oriented, with a bias toward installation"¹⁴ kind presented

in Traditions/Tensions. The works' unconventional appearance—an aspect relating to the iconoclastic attitude towards old art boundaries, such as Asian and western, high and low—was highly contrasting with western imaginations of Asian “timeless cultures”. Besides the curatorial blind spot, I argue that the works faced misrecognition because of what American art historian Hal Foster declares as the avant-garde's deferred temporality, that is, the temporal distance between making, display and recognition characteristic of these expressions.¹⁵ For the Third Avant-garde, the main aspect contributing to its under-theorisation relates to the presence of traditions, both invented and “in-use”.¹⁶

A Historical Assessment of the Avant-garde(s): Its Locations and Missions

It is commonly accepted that there were two avant-gardes in history: the European, often termed the “historical avant-garde” and which took place in the 1910s and 1920s, and the American, named “neo-avant-garde” by Foster, which took place in the 1960s and 1970s. Both events were defined by the significance of their transgressive art movements, yet the question of how to define them and what to include remains disputed.¹⁷ The former emerged as an insurgence against retinal art, while the latter proposed to break with the hegemony of a “Greenbergian” Abstractionism.¹⁸ Both avant-gardes promoted a liaison with real life, blurred the boundaries between disciplines by introducing ordinary objects into the discourse and thus broke art's elitism: historically, art has remained the privilege of a limited class.

Simultaneously with these western events, 1970s Southeast Asia witnessed an early avant-garde manifestation, notably through its social functions. Patrick D. Flores has described this emergence and identified similarities between the protests of unrelated students from the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia between 1974 and 1976.¹⁹ These groups were discontented with national subservience towards the West (that impacted the arts via fine arts education). Through their written manifestos, a discourse was formed and partisanship was elicited: they claimed attentiveness to the overlooked diversity and peoples that characterised their respective local cultures, proposed new media, claimed the primacy of concept over form, opted for a (re)searching attitude, and stressed the relationship between art and life. And one significant idea that would later become central within the Third Avant-garde that cohered in the 1990s is the regional interpretation of installation art as an autochthonous media, capable of expressing more precisely local identities due to the opportunity it provided artists to combine elements of

FIGURE 2: Jim Supangkat, *Ken Dedes*, 1996 (artist's reconstruction from the 1975 original). Mixed media, 61 × 44 × 27 cm. Collection of the National Gallery Singapore. Image Courtesy of National Heritage Board

local high and low art.²⁰ So, to introduce the Third Avant-garde's materiality, especially in its connection to traditions, it is important to mention one radical artwork from 1975: the installation *Ken Dedes* by Jim Supangkat.

The Breakthrough of the Third Avant-garde: *Ken Dedes*

Art student Jim Supangkat had been experimenting with conceptual art since 1975, especially by making installations that questioned notions of gender. In the same year, for the inaugural exhibition *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (Indonesian New Art Movement), Supangkat exhibited *Ken Dedes* (Figure 2).²¹

The *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* group, which Flores discussed in relation to other radical movements of the 1970s,²² is reputed for the introduction of late modern tendencies in Indonesia, such as minimalism, conceptual art and pop art, which announced the emergence of contemporary art in the country.²³ Installations, ready-mades, photography and cartoon art were showcased,²⁴ as one of the group's main objectives was to release artistic practice from the

confinement of the media of painting, sculpture and drawing.²⁵ They refused the sole rubric of “High Fine Art” in a western sense, proposing to take into account the local conception of Javanese fine art.²⁶ Thus they claimed to “give priority to research into the history of Indonesian New Art, which originated with Raden Saleh ... [and to] oppos[e] the sterile opinions of those who say that art is universal”.²⁷ As such, they intended to move beyond discourses on universalism and formalism characteristic of modern art, and especially those involving the procurement of an Indonesian painting that remained paramount in academic circuits.²⁸

I suggest that *Ken Dedes* be considered among the earliest and most prominent manifestations of the Third Avant-garde in Southeast Asia for two reasons.²⁹ First, *Ken Dedes* monopolised the critical discourse about the GRSB exhibition, an outcome which Supangkat claims was unintended. *Ken Dedes* was placed by GRSB members at the exhibition’s entrance, a decision that transformed it into “some kind of statement”³⁰ and was interpreted as expressing the group’s positioning against Suharto’s nationalistic discourse. Second, the work relates to the rewriting of history: it aptly demonstrates the paradoxes and shortcomings of national/regional frames, and invokes the ongoing debate about whether it is reasonable to continue inherited Orientalist discourses which regard the Hindu-Buddhist era as the height of local and regional civilisation(s). The work’s formal similarities with Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917), an object of everyday life resting on the top of a wooden plinth, make it plausible to say that Supangkat’s radicalism departed from it, but went beyond it by integrating a highly important local and regional symbol from Indonesian and Southeast Asian history.

The original statue of *Ken Dedes* (Figure 3) was produced during the kingdom of Singosari (1222–92 AD), which was enabled by the marriage of Ken Dedes with Ken Arok. Singosari was the predecessor of Majapahit, the most powerful empire in Southeast Asia to date. It remains in the realm of hypothesis if this statue constitutes a commemorative effigy of Prajñāpāramitā, the Buddhist goddess of transcendental wisdom, and is regarded by Dutch Orientalists as its most refined depiction dating from the East Javanese period (10th–14th centuries). In popular belief, the statue is believed to depict Ken Dedes, a queen known for her transcendental beauty and daughter of an important Mahayana Buddhism clergyman.³¹

The creation of *Ken Dedes* in 1975 is significant for its resonances with contemporaneous debates. The original 13th-century statue was, at the time, housed in the Museum Volkenkunde in Leiden, the Netherlands, yet Indonesian demands for its repatriation were intensifying; the statue was returned in 1977 and is now housed in the National Museum of Indonesia in Jakarta.³²

FIGURE 3: Prajñāpāramitā statue, believed to be the portrayal statue of Queen Ken Dedes, Singosari Period (1222–92 AD). Collection of the National Museum of Indonesia

The postcolonial claim for its return transpires notions of nation-building while perpetuating Orientalist discourses that value Singosari's art as classic.

Supangkat aptly employed the topical issue of the Indonesian state's claims for the statue's repatriation to criticise the New Order's instrumentalisation of a "great past": *Ken Dedes* manifests his discontent with a lack of postcolonial revisionism, as the historical figure's importance remained largely confined to her role as Ken Arok's wife, and not as the true enabler of Singosari. Historical records, most notably the *Pararaton* (also called *The Book of Kings*, written after 1489) kept her in relative obscurity. Supangkat's gesture claims her rightful status:

In my vision, Ken Dedes was a powerful woman, because she was attractive ... I made *Ken Dedes* to talk about the power of women. She was clever and an intellectual from a high caste. She started

Singosari and in my view, she set Ken Arok to power. Then history wrote about him. ... But it's unfair, how can a lower-ranked man become clever and important? It's to make an epic of the story ... her importance is negated as much as his importance is highlighted ... I saw the statue and thought she must have been a very intellectual woman. She was represented as a knowledge goddess.³³

Supangkat's "interest stemmed from gender issues ... [but] the work was analysed as a critic to traditionalism, which I didn't intend. [Prominent Indonesian art critic] Kusnadi said the work humiliated a 'great past'".³⁴ Initially, Supangkat's placing of the image of the deity atop an unrefined pedestal on which he drew a woman in a provocatively sexual pose was received as blasphemy. Yet, in retrospect, this gesture can be understood as embodying a double stance, addressing both local and international discourses. Locally speaking, the depiction of the suggestively posed woman underneath the image of Ken Dedes is an allusion to the *Pararaton's* report, in which Dedes's glowing pelvis is said to have been revealed by a gust of wind.³⁵ In international terms, by placing the 13th-century style bust above the plinth adorned with an image of 1970s fashions, Supangkat literally positioned the national above the international. Viewed in these ways, *Ken Dedes* demonstrates an unsubordinated position toward westernisation which, as we will see, is a common attitude among artists of the Third Avant-garde. So, the work performs the double dismantle that Indian art critic Geeta Kapur has proposed: it defies local invented traditions (including national-building discourses) while also refusing subservience to international models of art making.³⁶

During the 1980s, these radical intentions as articulated in Supangkat's *Ken Dedes* became marginal: according to Supangkat, in this decade Indonesian painting became a mainstream and highly valuable commodity. The art market experienced a boom, which would lead to the emergence of political art in the fringes of more commercially oriented activity.³⁷ These artists were no longer searching for a national identity, but rather for a cultural one.³⁸ The Third Avant-garde of the 1990s results from this programmatic shift.

Defining the Third Avant-garde of the 1990s: Its Mission and Specificities

The Third Avant-garde is a postmodern event, but it should not be equated with postmodernism. In 1981, the Italian art critic and curator Achille Bonito Oliva proposed the concept of a "transnational avant-garde" to refer to the work of a small group of Italian artists: a "bold claim" according to Terry

Smith.³⁹ Oliva proposed that these artists were united by a rejection of conceptual art. His description was markedly postmodern:

The trans-avant-garde rejects the idea of an artistic process aimed entirely at conceptual abstraction [and proposes the return] to hand craftsmanship and to a pleasure of execution. ... [Artists are] opting for attitudes that take into account languages that had previously been abandoned. This recovery does not entail identification with the styles of the past, but the ability to pick and choose from their surface ...⁴⁰

Oliva's remarks about the Italian artists share two aspects with the Third Avant-garde I identify in Southeast Asia. These are, first, the postmodern interest in tradition, albeit devoid of the self-critical discourse against invented traditions that characterise the Third Avant-garde, and second, the importance of a transnational geography: like the trans-avant-garde, the Third Avant-garde would not comply with geographical borders.

The Southeast Asian avant-garde's programme contains similar aspects to those of earlier avant-gardes in Europe and North America, notably the use of the ready-made, the recontextualising of objects and strategies of appropriation following the collection of fragments. In this regard, the Third Avant-garde's novelty is the introduction of local emblems and symbols into the realm of art. This is done not only to denote identity and origin (in order to differentiate from western mainstream art), but equally to reject the locally promoted attitude to traditions that reduced vibrant cultures into frozen invented traditions.

The Third Avant-garde did not emerge in a vacuum: its initial premise should be traced back to events in the mid-1970s such as the GSRB exhibition and other groups across Southeast Asia, which laid the foundations for a mode of art making that endures to this day. Third Avant-garde works comply with the fundamental premises of the avant-garde (as defined by German art historian Peter Bürger)—anti-institutionalism, liaison with life and blurring of high and low cultures⁴¹—and reaffirm the definition of avant-garde as force,⁴² imbued with a conscience of its own time⁴³ which, after electing its contemporary language and mission,⁴⁴ propels a change in the course of art history. Like previous avant-gardes, the Third Avant-garde manifests notions of discontent. Yet, it appears that the artists' "voices are not loud enough!"⁴⁵ and thus have been under-theorised.

As such, the Third Avant-garde constitutes a revision and an extension of the dominant discourses within avant-garde theories, and uses avant-

garde strategies for new ends. It is a revision because it (re)introduces into the debate the taxonomical division between art and ethnography, but this time the agents of contestation belong to the so-called non-western cultures, which have traditionally been regarded as “art’s ‘object-matter’ [rather] than its makers”.⁴⁶ It is an extension because it brings a new concept into the space of the avant-garde: the local idiom.⁴⁷

The 1990s were a crucial decade: while attempting to “catch up” with a developed West,⁴⁸ Asian cultures strove to preserve their cultural heritage and, in most cases, resorted to standards of cultural purity that resulted in “invented traditions”.⁴⁹ Artists started making self-critical work, in which invented traditions were ridiculed and smashed.

Kapur’s call for a double dismantling—of both local invented traditions and international models of art making—was effectively met in the practices of several Southeast Asian artists through the aforementioned incorporation of fragments of tradition. To Kapur, avant-garde emerges cyclically; for Foster, avant-garde remained an unfinished project, which explains its return. So, it can be said that critique had to continue because the avant-garde attack of art’s institutionalisation had not fully addressed the problematic of the traditional.⁵⁰ Significantly, this layer of criticism could only have emerged from those excluded from art historical and avant-garde’s discourse.⁵¹ The Third Avant-garde occupies this space of interference, and simultaneously disputes the modern metanarrative of fine arts and the taxonomical division between art and ethnography. It questions the veracity of these projects, while extending the main premise of the avant-garde: the ideology of the transgressive. Throughout history, all avant-garde(s) have shared an external commonality: the rejection of a normative model to follow. This is why Walter Benjamin wrote: “In every era the attempt must be made to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it”.⁵² The problem with this formulation for the present discussion is that in this case the “tradition” is itself the avant-garde. This might sound contradictory, but avant-garde, to continue its project, must build on its own missions, which will reveal themselves periodically.

As Kapur observes, tradition has most commonly served to stabilise societies that were going through shifting political and economic circumstances. This has permitted the opening of another intervening space for traditions: their *turn into a critique*,⁵³ thus enabling an avant-gardist stance. In other words, “it is what is done with ‘tradition’ ... that qualitatively marks the continuity of tradition”.⁵⁴ As such, traditions “will also contribute to cultural praxis”.⁵⁵ This is why when trying to explain what had been happening in recent years, in 1996, Argentine-born anthropologist Nestor García Canclini said:

To be cultured ... is not so much to connect oneself with a repertoire of exclusively modern objects and messages but to know *how to incorporate the avant-garde, as well as technological advances, into traditional patterns*.⁵⁶

The Third Avant-garde: Materials, Methods, Motivations and Limitations

As suggested, the Third Avant-garde constitutes a revision and extension of the modern avant-garde project. This is done by applying the three main premises of the avant-garde, as identified by Bürger: an anti-institutionalism that includes opposing and questioning art's autonomy, the reconnection between art and life, and an integration of high and low cultures. In this regard, the materiality of the Third Avant-garde is defined by the (re)appropriation⁵⁷ of material culture from traditional cultures that remained confined to the discourses of ethnography, an aspect that is especially significant for Southeast Asian cultures. Their continual relegation to the sphere of ethnographic museums in the West and "civilisation" museums and theme parks in the region is an example of what American anthropologist James Clifford defines, as the art/culture divide, "two avenues" that "are still separate zones of valuation and display".⁵⁸

Clifford affirms that cultural continuity was more discernible in earlier periods than today, but that examples can be found in the contemporary. So, traditions that persist have to be seen through a prism of heterogeneous elements—old and new, indigenous and foreign. Looking at them from this angle will result in a different analysis from the constructed ideas of authenticity and ancient traditions that have persisted over centuries. Questions such as authenticity become secondary, because tradition is a process. "As such," Clifford argues, "cultural forms will always be made, unmade and remade".⁵⁹ Drawing on Clifford's affirmations, I propose that Third Avant-garde artists *make, unmake and remake* traditions.

The Third Avant-garde draws on fragments of traditions, because as affirmed by British historian Eric Hobsbawm, in the context of modern (and postcolonial) nations, "traditions" are largely "invented".⁶⁰ Hobsbawm explains that invented traditions are established rapidly, and constructed with selected ancient materials. These materials (in reality, fragments) help establish conventions of a novel type for new purposes (such as nation-building or tourism). During the process, traditions lose their wholeness. So, when Oliva proposed that utilising traditions in an artistic context did not denote an identification with the styles of the past, but instead the artist's ability to pick and choose

from the traditional culture's surface, he was alluding to the postmodern revival of traditions, and this is a tenet the Third Avant-garde fights against: Harsono's *The Voices Are Controlled by the Powers* (1994/2011) aptly exemplifies this. His use of the mask denoted his discontent with its omnipresence, which the New Order regime instrumentalised to enforce good behaviour of Indonesian citizens. In addition, Hobsbawm demonstrates that revivals denote breaks.⁶¹ In consequence, recoveries are built on fragments. These fragments (such as the Panji mask) are manipulated as invented traditions and thus ossified.

Southeast Asia in the 1990s was characterised by the co-existence of "multiple temporalities". This circumstance originated the revaluation of the character of traditions within Traditions/Tensions, and its attempt to demonstrate that manifestations of "[p]ackaged nationalism in the form of docile girls with heavy makeup and false eyelashes in national costume dancing to traditional music"⁶² abounded in Southeast Asia. Third Avant-garde artists from the region, including Harsono, Indonesian artist Arahmaiani and Vietnamese Dinh Q. Lê, fiercely combated these "formulas" and instead infused traditions (relating to their personal histories) with those vanguard qualities that characterised nationalist movements of the independence era.⁶³ In doing so, they recovered traditions' critical stance.

In 1996, Poshyananda warned that traditions were being *reprocessed*:⁶⁴

Artists who live in Asian countries with complex and multilayered cultures are fully aware of the burden of negative traditions that might be associated with their works. The persistence of stereotypes means that any of these artists may be prejudged on the basis of his or her nationality, race, or religion. But artists such as ... Heri Dono [and] FX Harsono ... are not primarily concerned with self-reflection. Instead, they attempt to reveal the complexity of contemporary Asia through the revival or resurrection of traditional forms. But, again, they do not simply restage the past as a consensual process of invention of tradition. Rather their works include fragments of tradition that serve to question nationalistic aesthetics and bigotry.⁶⁵

The Third Avant-garde maintains procedures such as the ready-made, montage and decontextualisation of objects (the latter being a circumstance that traditional arts have endured for centuries, first in the West, later in the region, through their integration in specialised museums). These techniques and tactics were reappraised for their usefulness in transmitting messages to

FIGURE 4: Maria Madeira, *Silence at What Price?*, 1996. Mixed media with *tais*, 200 × 100 × 30 cm. Image courtesy of the artist

the audience. Avant-garde has a fondness for the scandalous, but the introduction of traditions constitutes a novel mode of acting which (unlike with *Ken Dedes*) does not immediately create a shock in the audience. Brutal messages of discontent conveyed by artists such as Maria Madeira in *Silence at What Price?* (1996) (Figure 4) do not immediately provoke sentiments of hatred: the message is delivered in a sharp and disruptive yet remarkably subtle and multiple-meaning way. I propose that the motivation behind these confronting yet subtle messages is not solely identity. It is largely true that these artists were only visible outside of their home countries—Supangkat refers to this Indonesian (and Timorese) development as “contemporary art in exile”⁶⁶—a circumstance that related to the danger of exhibiting politicised messages against Suharto’s New Order within the country. Yet these artists feel driven to act, to perform creatively political messages of discontent. This kind of activism is what Kate Orton Johnson defines as “DIY Citizenship”.⁶⁷ Immersed in a rubric of state-sponsored official art, artists responded with the same constructs, subversively. As Astri Wright observes, referring to Heri Dono:

The Indonesian government invests in the past and encourages traditional forms of art in order to counter new ones. So he decided to exploit the situation, expressing his own thoughts without really spelling them out. Even in the past the *wayang* has often been used

as a means for indirect and allusive suggestion, which is important in Javanese communication and social intercourse.⁶⁸

Heri Dono's and FX Harsono's 1990s installations employing aspects of Javanese traditional puppetry are well known: through them, theatres were converted into conceptual and politically charged installations, which were mostly exhibited internationally. The artists' use of traditions denoted the emergence of contemporary art in the region (following Smith's criteria), and equally revealed the ways in which traditions were being exploited by the Indonesian governing regime. Thus, in their active combat against the government, familiar codes such as *wayang* and *ikat* (which were certainly familiar in an Indonesian context) conveyed difficult messages to local and global audiences (the artists possibly hoped international audiences would help trigger change).

Yet, when viewed in foreign contexts, these extremely persuasive artworks were sometimes not fully comprehended. In retrospect, as HOFFIE points out, the first edition of the Asia Pacific Triennial in Queensland, in 1993, titled *Tradition and Change*, was uncritical of traditions, relegating their use to the realm of "memory, history and place", and perceiving change as associated with the "here and now".⁶⁹ With this remark, HOFFIE recalls American art historian Thomas McEvilley's observation that oftentimes the artist's "aim is invalidated or countermanded by the additional aiming that a curator gives the work in exhibiting it".⁷⁰ The incomplete readings by curators not only prevented them from identifying the critical potential of traditions, as exemplified in these works, but it also deferred the definition of a specific avant-garde trend in these artworks. As such, critical gestures against "invented traditions" and the regional refusal to remain subservient to Western art remained undetected.

The Third Avant-garde: Messages of Discontent

The 1990s were politically significant in Southeast Asia: some societies, such as Indonesia and Timor-Leste, were living under dictatorial regimes while others, following the dismantlement of the USSR in 1991, experienced other forms of regime change. Memories of persecution, as well as themes of genocide, censorship and oppression appeared in artworks from this period, often installations containing fragments of traditions, "all within the sobriety of an analytic discourse".⁷¹ Artists' messages of discontent were directed toward local repressive politics and the biased West, which consumed difference but was complicit in the face of severe human rights abuses.

Third Avant-garde works, as mentioned, were mostly exhibited outside of Southeast Asia, to audiences that probably remained unaware of these political circumstances. Nevertheless, these audiences, who were educated in conceptual art and used to displays celebrating timeless cultures, failed to grasp that “the insistence on indigenous materials and themes in the work practice of a number of artists ... had, for at least a decade, been embraced as part of a resistance to the aesthetic and economic demands of an international art world dominated by Western values”.⁷² And probably because these international audiences remained hostage to cultural constructs deriving from contact with ethnographic museums and the more recent invented traditions propagated by the tourism industry, few viewers grasped the critical value of artists’ use of traditions.

Maria Madeira (Gleno, 1969) was born in Timor-Leste and uprooted from the country after the Indonesian occupation in 1975. Exiled in Portugal and Australia until 2000, Madeira found in Timor-Leste’s traditions the source for her “voice” in the art world. A relevant aspect of her avant-gardism is her reference to a country that did not exist in the time of her 1990s works. During the occupation period (1975–99), her inclination towards foreign audiences was instinctive and must be acknowledged as an urge to preserve “a culture that was being destroyed and dismantled through genocide”.⁷³ In 1996, Madeira conceived and exhibited at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts two of her most important installations: *Silence at What Price?* (Figure 4) and *270+*, *The Santa Cruz Massacre* (1996) (Figure 5). Both contained references to two tragic events that she learned about while in exile.

In the title *270+*, Madeira directly addresses the number of victims killed on 12 November 1991, when approximately 3,000 students mourning the death of pro-liberation student Sebastião Gomes were fired upon by the Indonesian military inside the Santa Cruz cemetery. In this installation, she enshrined each victim by representing him/her through a traditional *kaibauk* (a crescent-shaped crown used in ceremonial apparel for both women and men) that was placed on top of a black squared cross. The cross not only symbolised the Catholic religion of the mourners, it also addressed the artist’s discontent with the media’s lack of precision when reporting the number of victims (“more than 270”). Madeira’s approach in *Silence at What Price?* is more brutal. On top of a wooden structure (resembling a bed) carved with nails, she placed a full-length *tais* cloth (*tais*, or *ikat* in Indonesian, is today the country’s national textile). Madeira explains that during interrogation in the hands of Indonesian military, the student Fernando Boavida “was made to lie on a plank of sharp nails, while another plank was laid atop of him. A heavy tyre was placed on top of the second plank. When Fernando failed to

FIGURE 5: Maria Madeira, 270+ *The Santa Cruz Massacre*, 1996. Mixed media with *kaibauk*, 350 × 350 cm. Image courtesy of the artist

give his torturers “satisfactory answers”, another tyre was added”.⁷⁴ Fernando died three days after his arrest. The representation of his body through a piece of *tais* cloth also connotes local funerary rituals.

Concurrently to the Timorese events, in Indonesia, artists such as FX Harsono (Blitar, 1949) expressed their discontent with the New Order. On at least three occasions, Harsono cleverly used the Panji mask, a symbol that came to signify the refinement of Javanese character—an invented tradition—to represent the hegemony of Javanese culture over other minorities, especially the Chinese (of which he is part). In *Disappear* (1998) (Figure 6), Harsono expresses his concern over the vanishing of those who opposed the regime. In *The Voices are Controlled by the Powers* (1994) (Figure 1), possibly Harsono’s most famous work after being exhibited at *Traditions/Tensions*, he placed 100 Panji masks (several characters of the tale were used), which he had bisected under the nose, on the top of a black cloth. The installation is distributed in two areas: the eyes and foreheads around the edges of the cloth, and the mouths and chins at its centre. It thus appears as if perhaps the eyes are looking at the mouths in a controlling fashion, or that they are looking towards each other, in a manner that suggests surveillance. This work,

FIGURE 6: FX Harsono, *Disappear*, 1998. Installation with photocopy paper, wooden burned traditional masks and newspaper. Variable dimensions. Image courtesy of the artist

FIGURE 7: Arahmaiani, *Etalase*, 1994. Display case containing personal photograph, icon, Coca-Cola bottle, Al-Qur'an, fan, Patkwa mirror, drum, box of sand, and pack of condoms, 95 × 147 × 67 cm. Image courtesy of the artist

which was made to protest the banning of *TEMPO* magazine in 1994, was again exhibited on the occasion of Harsono's solo show at the Singapore Art Museum in 2011. For this exhibition, the installation was remade: as the original masks had deteriorated over time, the artist bought new ones and repeated the process. The work has not lost its relevance; Javanese culture remains dominant in the Indonesian political landscape.

Arahmaiani (Bandung, 1961) is the most internationally renowned Indonesian artist questioning gender issues both at a local and international level. During the 1990s, Arahmaiani produced some of her most polemical works: through the painting *Lingga-Yoni* (1993) and the performance *Handle Without Care* (1996), she claimed the recovery of gender equality that characterised the historical Indonesian Hindu-Buddhist culture. In the work *Etalase* (1994) (Figure 7)—the title originates from a pun on the French word *étalage*, or display case—a 19th-century museum vitrine (possibly a colonial remnant) was injected with objects that were regarded as non-precious, alongside others that would be more likely to appear in a museum case of this kind. From left to right, counter-clockwise, these include: an image of the Buddha, a Pakwa mirror, a copy of the Qur'an, a box of condoms, a Coca-Cola bottle, a fan, a portrait, a bag containing sand and a drum. Arahmaiani's selection

FIGURE 8: Dinh Q. Lê, *Untitled*—from the series *Splendour and Darkness*, 1998 (2005 edition). Photo-weaving and linen tape, Triptych (160×120 cm each). Images courtesy of the artist

reveals what was then considered to be precious, including religion, sex, food, self-imagery, land and music. When it was first exhibited in *Traditions/Tensions*, this work was deemed highly polemical and removed from the show: Arahmaiani had provocatively placed the condom box between the Qur'an and the Coca-Cola bottle, causing a stir among the American audience. In the artist's home country, a fatwa was issued against her because of the condom's proximity with the Qur'an. While, as Poshyananda observes, the debate questioning "is this art?" was inevitable,⁷⁵ the work also predicted many later cultural currencies, especially land and obsession with selfies in social media.

Vietnamese Dinh Q. Lê (Hà Tiên, 1968) is world-renowned for his woven photographs that appropriate the traditional art of weaving grass mats. Since the early 1990s, through the combination of two or more photographs, Lê has negotiated his position as a Vietnamese exiled in the US and within the art world, as well as made critical work on partisan views of the American-Vietnamese conflict and the history of the Khmer Rouge regime. Using a technique he learned as a child before his exile in the US, Lê affirms that he only weaves photographs when the craft appears pertinent to the message he aims to convey.⁷⁶ Oftentimes, his woven photographs "fix" and/or revise partisan or incomplete readings of historical facts. After a trip to Cambodia in 1994, during which he visited the Khmer Rouge's Tuol Seng prison as well as the temples of Angkor Wat, Lê conceived the series *Cambodia: Splendour and Darkness* (1994–1998) (Figure 8). In this series, he intertwines photos of statues and temples with images of prisoners tagged before execution. With these photographs, Lê proposed a remake (based on his reading) of the narrative of Cambodian history: by combining two of its most marking moments, the artist questioned how the same civilisation could produce

FIGURE 9: A, B: FX Harsono, *Writing in the Rain*, 2011. Performance (documented in video). Images courtesy of the artist

such different outcomes of beauty and pain. This series somewhat addresses Lê's own personal history, as his family fled after the Khmer Rouge invaded Hà Tiên in 1977.

Given their emergence in a period of political turmoil, one might have expected that after the year 2000, when many political conflicts were resolved, Third Avant-garde works would no longer appear. Yet the opposite is true, demonstrating that while some circumstances disappear, others emerge. Many regional contemporary artists continue to use available traditions,

thus captivating national and international audiences. While arguably the tone of discontent has shifted toward addressing collective negligence and ignorance, artists' messages remain highly politicised. In recent years, artists increasingly reflect on aspects of the surrounding cultural landscape that have been repressed, ignored, neglected or undervalued.

Harsono's practice exemplifies this change; since prohibitions against the Chinese were lifted in 1998–99, Harsono started making work to recapture the essence of Chinese Peranakan culture in Indonesia, to complete the narrative of the country from which the Chinese have been erased. Initially he experimented with his own personal trauma: in the performance *Rewriting the Erased* (2009), Harsono makes the viewer witness how the passage of time—circa 50 years—had practically annulled his capacity to write his original Chinese name with ink and brush. Later, the performance *Writing in the Rain* (2011) (Figure 9) shows his failed attempts at writing his name Oh Hong Boen, with the rain deleting all his inscriptions, as if the personal need to create a record is negated by outside circumstances. This obliterating rain alludes to the official discourse, one which focuses on erasure and forgetting, which does not acknowledge the facts of mass killing and rape that had affected many Chinese in Indonesia (especially in 1965–66 and 1996–98), and which refuses to offer assistance to victims and their families.

With the video *I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Legend* (2004) (Figure 10), Arahmaiani calls for a revaluation of what she regards as the sexist content of the Ramayana story. In the Indian epic story (and its Javanese translation and telling), following the abduction by Rawana, Sita proves her chastity by undergoing a trial by fire. After this test, Sita and Rama finally marry. In Arahmaiani's video, Sita performs a monologue calling on society to perform the same moral judgement towards men.

Between 2007 and 2015, the young Indonesian artist Albert Yonathan Setyawan (Bandung, 1983) explored Buddhist teachings in his work. Guided by the Hindu-Buddhist culture of Java, he has created installations in which he celebrates the legacies of Southeast Asian Buddhism. Inspired by sites such as Ayutthaya and Borobudur,⁷⁷ he conceives installations made mainly in porcelain and clay, two timeless yet fragile materials that recall archaeological sites worldwide. Setyawan's structures mainly use a single element—the stupa—the quintessential structure that permeates much of Southeast Asian Buddhism. Stupas may be squared, round or pyramidal, and their dimensions vary between architectural towers and votive miniatures made in bronze. Setyawan conflates the two dimensions: in his floor installations, such as *Mandala Study #5* (2015) (Figure 11), miniatures of stupas are dispersed along the geometrical shape of the *mandala* (the artist equally works on the

FIGURE 10: Arahmaiani, *I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Legend*, 2004. Still image from 12' video. Image courtesy of the artist

FIGURE 11: Albert Yonathan Setyawan, *Mandala Study #5: the Red Temples*, 2015. Terracotta and white marble sand, 300 × 300 × 10 cm. Image courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery

FIGURE 12: A, B: Kamin Lertchaiprasert, *Lord Buddha Said 'If you see dhamma, you see me'*, 2003/4. Shredded Thai Bath bank notes, A) Installation view; B) Head 244 × 73 × 73 cm; Torso 206 × 83 × 79 cm; Feet 70 × 79 × 78 cm. Images courtesy of the artist

structure of the labyrinth), as if he were creating a miniature of Ayutthaya. The reference to the *mandala* mirrors the stages of the Buddha's process of enlightenment, which he invites spectators to pursue. In Setyawan's hands, the mandala regains its traditional status as a meditative technique that helps find order in the chaos in which humanity inhabits.

In 2003–04, Thai artist Kamin Lertchaiprasert (Lop Buri, 1964) produced the fragmented work *Lord Buddha said: 'If you see dhamma, you see me'* (2003–04) (Figure 12). At first glance, the work recalls broken statues from antiquity, the remains of which are preserved in world museums and inside the households of the wealthy, often after having been smuggled by traffickers. Yet, on closer inspection, one discovers that the artist made these sculptures not from stone but from shredded Thai baht banknotes that had lost their value in the economic crisis of 1997, the same crisis that had precipitated the downfall of Suharto in 1998 and the Timorese referendum in 1999. Lertchaiprasert's Buddha is represented in one of his most celebrated positions: the “walking Buddha”, which refers to the Buddha's third week after

enlightenment, and which has retained firm roots in the region of the ancient Lan Na kingdom (13th–18th centuries), today’s Chiang Mai. Depending on the Buddha’s walking direction, he displays certain hand gestures or *mudras*. In this work, Buddha performs a “fear not” *mudra*, as if the artist were communicating to his close community that they should not fear the consequences of the severe economic crisis.

Since 2008, Thai artist Jakkai Siributr’s (Bangkok, 1969) work has become increasingly critical toward Thais and their relation to a Buddhism that he envisions tending toward a post-Buddhist era.⁷⁸ His sarcasm has targeted monks, the military and government officials alike—these latter works, included in the exhibitions *Plunder* (2013) and *Transient Shelter* (2014) have been exhibited “in exile”, as he believes Thailand’s ultra-conservative Buddhist government would most probably have censored his work. In 2014, Siributr conceived *78* (2014) (Figure 13), one of his most explicitly political works. This piece, made to remember the horror of the 25 October 2004 incident in southern Thailand in which 78 Muslim separatists died at the hands of the police, calls for reconciliation between the Muslim minority who worship Allah and speak Arabic, with the majority Buddhist and Thai-speaking society. The work displays in rows and columns the names of the 78 victims, who were found dead as a result of the severe conditions in which they were transported to a camp (handcuffed, and stacked on top of each other). The artist’s intent to help foster communication made him embroider reconciling messages in Thai calligraphy, which he Islamised.⁷⁹

Concluding Remarks

The Southeast Asian Third Avant-garde is as varied, diverse and rich as the region itself: it may project the viewer to globalised textiles such as *tais*, famous theatres, world religions or gender inequality. This specific avant-gardism relies equally on the ready-made that changed the world of art a century years ago, and on the slowly-made forms of craft. As such, the Third Avant-garde’s main contribution to discourse resides in the possibility it fosters in merging the “two avenues of art and culture” in one single route. This leads to a considerable discomfort, both for art historical narratives and for museum displays.

My proposal of the concept of the Third Avant-garde is not a reference to the former Third World but instead aims to dismantle the third layer of the modernist exclusionary system: if the first avant-garde refused to make eye-pleasing art, and questioned what art was, and the second avant-garde proclaimed the possibility of art existing outside the modern art museum,

FIGURE 13: A, B: Jakkai Siributr, 78, 2014. Steel scaffolding, bamboo, fabric and embroidery, 350 × 350 × 350 cm. Image courtesy of YAVUZ Fine Art

expanding the field of intervention, then the Third Avant-garde takes these proposals one step further, refusing the taxonomical divide between art and ethnography. This is a project that could (only) emerge in the “non-western” world, which was the victim of the taxonomical system that excluded many of the world’s societies from the rubric of art.

By definition, an avant-garde work must be, in a sense, untimely; it must be out—meaning ahead—of its own historical moment, more appropriately placed in the future, which it envisages. Avant-garde works problematise the “here” and “now”; their function is to go a step further. The selection of artworks presented in this article demonstrate not only artists’ refusal to make art along western constructs, but equally they convey unsettling realities of collective trauma and pain, which artists express through familiar codes. Thus, introducing traditional arts within contemporary art is not contradictory to art making, but rather demonstrates (regional) resilience in making “postmodernism in our own terms”, as Kapur suggested, before the West defines it.⁸⁰ Using traditions becomes vitally important, Kapur claims, because “it is what renders us distinguishable.”⁸¹

The artists discussed in this article exemplify the Third Avant-garde, but they are not the only ones whose practice can be considered in this context. Their works convey locality through traditions—this is discernible in Lertchaiprasert’s walking Buddha or Madeira’s installations—as much as issues of global relevance, including economic downfalls and genocide. This is what makes the Third Avant-garde so unique: the impact of these manifestations is equally significant for nearby and broader communities because its formal features, including the use of ready-mades, slow crafting and assemblage, are merged with documentation of regional histories that know no borders.

Many other artists from the region could be referred as making Third Avant-garde art: Vietnamese Tiffany Chung has conceived several embroidered maps in which she articulates histories of conflict; the recent work by Indonesian Nindityo Adipurnomo and Dutch-born Mella Jaarsma from Yogyakarta explores Indonesian Peranakan culture; the American-Indonesian duo Brahma Tirta Sari investigates how Javanese batik has historically appropriated animistic, Hindu and Buddhist elements, and deconstructs myths around this art. Regional artists persist in using traditional arts, showing not only that traditions are alive, but that their critical value is one of high effectiveness.

And by defining these artists works as avant-garde, we grant them what Clark proposes: “the confidence as a member of a new intelligentsia marked by access to the new wave of progress that would change the world”.⁸²

BIOGRAPHY

Leonor Veiga is a PhD candidate at Leiden University. Her thesis, “The Third Avant-Garde: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia Recalling Tradition”, analyses contemporary art practices from the region that reprocess elements of traditional culture. It is supervised by Kitty Zijlmans and Pieter ter Keurs. Veiga’s writing on the arts (2010–15) has focused mainly on Southeast Asian contemporary art. Articles published include “Movimentu Kultura: Making Timor-Leste”, in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Timor-Leste* (forthcoming 2017); “Movimentu Kultura in Timor-Leste: Maria Madeira’s Agency”, *Cadernos Arte e Antropologia* 4, 1 (2015) and “Suddenly We Arrived: Polarities and Paradoxes of Indonesian Contemporary Art”, in *Indonesian Eye: Contemporary Indonesian Art*, ed. Serenella Ciclitira (Skira, 2011).

NOTES

- ¹ Some important Third Avant-garde works were produced in the 1980s, when postmodernism was taken up in the region.
- ² See James Clifford, "Thinking Globally: Museums, Art and Ethnography after the Global Turn", symposium on "Collecting Geographies", Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/89998837> [accessed Feb. 2017].
- ³ See Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 1–10.
- ⁴ Smith argues that the shift from modern to contemporary art is unmistakable since the 1980s. See *What is Contemporary Art?*, pp. 1–10. The 1980s is an important decade because of a series of world events that changed the world order into one of multiple centres. Already in 1979, the Iranian Revolution that deposed the Shah Reza Pahlavi marked a resistance against western domination. The year 1989 is equally considered a hinge year, for it was marked by a succession of international events: the fatwa issued against Salman Rushdie and his publishers after the publication of *The Satanic Verses* (1988); the Tiananmen events in China; and the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the arts, 1989 witnessed the first exhibition of art from all over the world: *Magiciens de la Terre* in the Centre Pompidou in Paris; the third edition of the Havana Biennial, which since its second edition in 1986 represented Third World countries beyond Latin America and the Caribbean; and the first postcolonial exhibition, *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, in London. In Southeast Asia, the opening of Cemeti Gallery in 1988 is significant, as this was the first space to house alternative practices in Indonesia.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- ⁶ See Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio, "Politics, Society and the State", in *Asian Art Now* (New York, NY: Monacelli Press, 2010), pp. 78–9. Their interpretation follows the reading by Australian art historian Caroline Turner. See Caroline Turner (ed.), "Art and Social Change", in *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005), p. 9.
- ⁷ Examples of important exhibitions in the Pacific region: the Fukuoka Art Museum Asian Art Show since 1984 (it was replaced by the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale in 1999); the Artists Regional Exchange in Perth, Australia since 1987; the Jogja Biennale, which started in 1988; the Asia Pacific Triennial in Queensland, Australia since 1993; the Japan Foundation shows since 1995; the Singapore Biennale since 1996, among others. Another contributing show for the emergence of non-western art on the world stage is the Havana Biennial, which has included a selection of Southeast Asian artists since its second edition, in 1986.
- ⁸ Jim Supangkat, "The Third Avant-garde", unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, 18 Apr. 2016.

- ⁹ See Patrick D. Flores, "Revisiting Tradition and the Incommensurate Contemporary", *Broadsheet* 41, 4 (2012): 234–9; Pat Hoffie, "The Irreverent Contemporary and Radical Tradition", in *Contemporary Asian Art and Exhibitions: Connectivities and World-Making*, ed. Caroline Turner and Michelle Antoinette (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), pp. 109–28.
- ¹⁰ Vishakha N. Desai, "Foreword", in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, ed. Apinan Poshyananda (New York, NY: Asia Society, 1996), p. 13.
- ¹¹ Geeta Kapur, "Dismantling the Norm", in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, ed. Apinan Poshyananda (New York, NY: Asia Society, 1996), p. 67.
- ¹² Apinan Poshyananda, "The Future: Post-Cold War, Postmodernism, Post-Marginalia (Playing with Slippery Lubricants)", in *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Caroline Turner (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1993), p. 6.
- ¹³ Thomas McEvelley, "Exhibition Strategies in the Postcolonial Era", in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, ed. Apinan Poshyananda (New York, NY: Asia Society, 1996), p. 57.
- ¹⁴ Holland Cotter, "The Brave New Face of Art from the East", *New York Times*, 29 Sept. 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/09/29/arts/the-brave-new-face-of-art-from-the-east.html> [accessed Aug. 2017].
- ¹⁵ Hal Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?", *October The Duchamp Effect* 70 (Autumn 1994): 11.
- ¹⁶ See Geeta Kapur, "Contemporary Cultural Practice: Some Polemical Categories", *Social Scientist* 18, 3 (1990): 56–9.
- ¹⁷ The historical avant-garde contained two streams: the anarchic/negativistic stream of Dada and surrealism, and the heroic/modernist stream that has, in cubism, its most important manifestation because it used some avant-garde aspects and strategies. While the European avant-garde should not be regarded as a unified, monolithic and singular entity, the discussion of its internal divisions is beyond the scope of this article.
- ¹⁸ See Dietrich Scheunemann, "From Collage to the Multiple: On the Genealogy of Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde", in *Avant-Garde/Neo-Avant-Garde*, ed. Dietrich Scheunemann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), p. 17.
- ¹⁹ Patrick D. Flores, "First Person Plural: Manifestos of the 1970s in Southeast Asia", in *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, ed. Hans Belting et al. (Karlsruhe: Hatje Cantz, 2011), pp. 224–71. An additional analysis of Southeast Asian avant-garde permeates the publication by T.K. Sabapathy (ed.), *Intersecting Histories, Contemporary Turns in Southeast Asian Art* (Singapore: Nanyang Technological University, 2012).
- ²⁰ See Poshyananda, "The Future", p. 14.
- ²¹ Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru [New Art Movement] was the first conceptual art movement in Indonesia and lasted between 1975 and 1979. On the occasion,

Supangkat also exhibited for the first time *Kamar Ibu dan Anak* [Bedroom of a Woman and her Child], his first installation work referencing gender issues.

Jim Supangkat, "Ken Dedes", unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, 7 Mar. 2016.

- ²² The Thai group, the "Artists' Front of Thailand" was formed in 1974, and its manifesto published in 1975; the Filipino body named Kaisahan (formerly NPAA) circulated its manifesto in 1976; and the Malay organisation named Mystical Reality was founded in 1974 by artists Sulaiman Esa and Redza Piyadasa through an exhibition with the same title. See Flores, "First Person Plural", pp. 230–61.
- ²³ See Jim Supangkat, "The People in 70 Years", in *The People in 70 Years* (Magelang: OHD Museum, 2015), pp. 12–52.
- ²⁴ According to Supangkat, these developments initially took place in Bandung. See *ibid.*
- ²⁵ F.X. Harsono, "Memory and Contemporaneity", interview by Leonor Veiga, Yogyakarta, 10 Jan. 2010, http://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/2039/3/ULFBA_TES356_ANEXOS.pdf, p. 5 [accessed Feb. 2017].
- ²⁶ The concept of fine art (*kagunan*) and low art is not alien to Javanese culture. See Jim Supangkat, "A Search of a New Platform: An Introduction", in *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond* (Jakarta: Indonesia Fine Arts Foundation, 1997), p. 12.
- ²⁷ Brita L. Miklouho-Maklai, "Appendix A: The Five Lines of Attack of the Indonesian New Art Movement", in *Exposing Society's Wounds: Some Aspects of Contemporary Indonesian Art since 1966* (Adelaide: The Flinders University of South Australia, 1991), pp. 113–4.
- ²⁸ According to him, the debates on painting had essentially three factions: first, Oesman Effendi's fondness for universalism, made evident in his declaration that "there is no Indonesian painting; second, Kusnadi's views on the originality of Indonesian modern art through past references; and third, Sudjoko's extreme position, that denied the validity of any Indonesian art manifestation outside the rubric of traditional art.
- ²⁹ I am aware that other artists of GRSB and from the region used traditional arts in their installations, but access to this information is scarce. Locally, *Ken Dedes* became so influential due to the polemic it caused that it practically monopolised discourse on GRSB's early activity.
- ³⁰ Supangkat, "Ken Dedes".
- ³¹ Museum Volkenkunde, "3.6 Prajnaparamita and Other Buddhist Deities", *Singosari: The Origins of Majapahit* 6, <http://singosari.info/en/node/1049> [accessed 27 Mar. 2015].
- ³² Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff, "Exchange and Protection of Java's Antiquities: A Transnational Approach to the Problem of Heritage in Colonial Java", *Journal of Asian Studies* 72, 4 (2013): 907.

- ³³ Jim Supangkat, "Memory and Contemporaneity", interview by Leonor Veiga, Yogyakarta, 14 Jan. 2010, http://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/2039/3/ULFBA_TES356_ANEXOS.pdf, p. 37.
- ³⁴ Supangkat, "Ken Dedes". The heated debate between Kusnadi and Sudarmadji (who authorised the exhibition in TIM) went on for some time in newspapers.
- ³⁵ See Museum Volkenkunde, "3.6 Prajnaparamita and Other Buddhist Deities".
- ³⁶ Geeta Kapur, "Dismantled Norms: Apropos Other Avantgardes (2000)", in *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Caroline Turner (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005), p. 67.
- ³⁷ See Jim Supangkat, "Art and Politics in Indonesia", in *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005), p. 218.
- ³⁸ See Jim Supangkat, "Contemporary Art, Development Beyond the 1970's", in *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond* (Jakarta: Indonesia Fine Arts Foundation, 1997), p. 78.
- ³⁹ The "Transavantgarde Constellation" was formed by Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Nicola de Maria and Mimmo Paladino. See Achille Bonito Oliva, *Art Beyond the Year Two Thousand* (Bali: BIASA Artspace Little Library, 2011), pp. 169–99 (187–8); Terry Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents* (London: Laurence King, 2011), p. 53.
- ⁴⁰ Bonito Oliva, "The International Trans-Avant-Garde", in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (New York, NY: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 257.
- ⁴¹ See Peter Bürger, "The Avant-Gardiste Work of Art", in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, 13th ed., vol. 4, *Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 55–82.
- ⁴² See Kapur, "Dismantling the Norm".
- ⁴³ See Paul Willemsen, "An Avant Garde for the Eighties", *Framework* 0 24 (Spring 1984): 53–73.
- ⁴⁴ See Sérgio Coutinho, "A Vanguarda Europeia: Entre a 'Globalização' e a 'Unidade Humana'", PhD thesis (Lisbon: Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2015).
- ⁴⁵ Huang Xiao-Feng, "Mio Pang Fei's Artistic Explorations", in *Exhibition of Paintings by Mio Pan Fei*, ed. António Conceição Júnior (Macau: Fundação Oriente, 1992), p. 25.
- ⁴⁶ The artificial boundaries between art and ethnography are not necessarily a new discussion. Yet I consider the Third Avant-garde to constitute the first time the discussion being introduced within the rubric of avant-garde practices and the notion of local contributed to the argument. Ann Gibson, "Avant-Garde", in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 156.
- ⁴⁷ The concept of "local" and its use as implicating a sense of social usefulness is not new in Southeast Asia, appearing in recent literature. Singaporean curator Tan Boon Hui notes that the notion of art for art's sake never really took hold in

the region; instead, art must have a purpose for society. See, for example, Tan Boon Hui, "Four Propositions: Looking at Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia", in *Negotiating Home, History and Nation: Two Decades of Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia 1991–2001*, ed. Lola Lenzi, Boon Hui Tan and Khairuddin Hori (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2011), pp. 29–38. The notion of "idiom" pertains to the discursive capacities of a particular language, which is not discernable to those for whom it is foreign. Thus, the notion of "local idiom" implies that each tradition employed may contain discursive aspects that may not be immediately grasped by a foreign audience.

⁴⁸ See Apinan Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers, Desperate Dragons in Transition", in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, p. 25.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 26. As affirmed by British historian Eric Hobsbawm, invented traditions are often modern constructs tied to notions of nationalism. See Eric J. Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions", in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, 20th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1–14.

⁵⁰ Artists of the "historical avant-garde", especially the cubists and the surrealists, performed the introduction of traditional elements within art practices.

⁵¹ While ideas of modernity and contemporaneity are recognised as having a global span, the notion of avant-garde remains a western-centric construct. See Okwui Enwezor, "The Black Box", in *Documenta 11 Platform 5: Exhibition Catalogue*, ed. Heike Ander and Nadja Rottner (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2002), pp. 42–54.

⁵² Walter Benjamin, "Thesis on the Philosophy of History", in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 247.

⁵³ Kapur, "Contemporary Cultural Practice", p. 58.

⁵⁴ John Clark, "Formation of the Neotraditional", in *Modern Asian Art* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), p. 75.

⁵⁵ Kapur, "Contemporary Cultural Practice", p. 51.

⁵⁶ Néstor García Canclini, "Modernity after Postmodernity (1995)", in *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 28. Emphasis added.

⁵⁷ Generally, "appropriation" is understood as an illegitimate borrowing, of taking into one's reality something that is not one's own. "Reappropriation" manifests when an object outside of art's realm enters the discourse of art. This is a problematic distinction for the specific case of traditional arts, since it perpetuates the divide between art and ethnography.

⁵⁸ Clifford, "Thinking Globally".

⁵⁹ James Clifford, "Indigenous Articulations", *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, 2 (2001): 479.

⁶⁰ Hobsbawm, "Introduction", p. 1.

⁶¹ See *ibid.*, p. 8.

- ⁶² Poshyananda, "The Future", p. 5. This sort of gaze toward Asian women was criticised by Indonesian artist Arahmaiani in the performance *Handle Without Care* (1996), in which the artist dressed as a Balinese queen, holding a (plastic) gun, to suggest a "new" role and increased power for contemporary women.
- ⁶³ See Kapur, "Contemporary Cultural Practice", pp. 51–2.
- ⁶⁴ Kapur explains that whenever traditions are reworked, this constitutes an act of invention as much as of self-subversion. See Kapur, "Dismantling the Norm", p. 61.
- ⁶⁵ Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers, Desperate Dragons in Transition", p. 29.
- ⁶⁶ Supangkat and Veiga, "Ken Dedes".
- ⁶⁷ See Kate Orton-Johnson, "DIY Citizenship, Critical Making, and Community", in *DIY Citizenship: Critical Making and Social Media*, ed. Matt Ratto and Megan Boler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), pp. 141–55.
- ⁶⁸ Astri Wright quoted in Gianni Simone, "Contemporary Art in Indonesia: From Solo to Mass, Spiritual to Social", *San Francisco Art Quarterly (SFAQ)* 17, 3 (2014): 52.
- ⁶⁹ Hoffie, "The Irreverent Contemporary", p. 111.
- ⁷⁰ McEvilley, "Exhibition Strategies", p. 55.
- ⁷¹ Gerardo Mosquera, "The Marco Polo Syndrome: Some Problems around Art and Eurocentrism", in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, ed. Zaya Kocur and Simon Leung (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 221.
- ⁷² Hoffie, "The Irreverent Contemporary", p. 113.
- ⁷³ Maria Madeira, "Maria Madeira's Art", interview by Leonor Veiga, Dili, July 2011.
- ⁷⁴ Maria Madeira, "List of Works 2003–2011" (Dili, 2011).
- ⁷⁵ Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers, Desperate Dragons in Transition", p. 43.
- ⁷⁶ Dinh Q. Lê, "Splendour and Darkness", unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, 14 Apr. 2016.
- ⁷⁷ Albert Yonathan Setyawan, "Albert Yonathan Setyawan's installation art", unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, 23 Mar. 2014.
- ⁷⁸ Pattana Kitiarsa, "Beyond Syncretism: Hybridization of Popular Religion in Contemporary Thailand", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 36, 3 (2005): 465.
- ⁷⁹ Jakkai Siributr, "78", unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, 10 Mar. 2016.
- ⁸⁰ Geeta Kapur, "When Was Modernism in Indian Art?", in *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (1995), ed. Geeta Kapur (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2000), pp. 297–298.
- ⁸¹ Ibid.
- ⁸² John Clark, "The Avant-Garde", in *Modern Asian Art* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), p. 231.

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