Introduction

At the first national Islamic calligraphic exhibition in Indonesia in 1979, Ahmad Sadali (1924–1987), an artist and Muslim intellectual, wrote a preface highlighting how calligraphy was emerging as an expression of modern art. Sadali was the chair of this state-supported exhibition, which invited 28 artists to show their works. This included prominent modern artists such as Affandi (1907–1990) and Fadjar Sidik (1930–2004), and others like A.D. Pirous (b. 1932) and Haryadi Suadi (1938–2016). As noted by Sadali in the preface to the catalogue, the exhibition celebrated the “rebirth” of Islamic art and culture in Indonesia through calligraphic expression, an aspect of the region’s Islamic religiosity and history that Sadali argued has been neglected. In an article commemorating the passing of Sadali in 1987, prominent Indonesian art critic Sanento Yuliman (1941–1992) rearticulates Sadali’s reflection, referring to the artistic and material manifestations of religion and religiosity as “dimensi yang tersisihkan” (the neglected dimension) in the development of modern and contemporary art in Indonesia.
If Sadali introduced modern calligraphic expressions to Indonesian audiences, celebrating the rebirth of Islamic aesthetics from the “neglected dimension” in 1979; *The Neglected Dimension* (2023) by the National Gallery Singapore extends the same spirit by calling attention to the significant moments when modern and contemporary artists in the region began to reimagine the potentialities of Arabic and Jawi scripts. At the same time, *The Neglected Dimension* highlights the importance of artists associated with the artistic training in Bandung, one of the key sites where the practice and discourse of “modern and contemporary Islamic art” began to develop through experimentations with Islamic/Arabic calligraphy and forms of abstraction. Bandung and Indonesia are certainly not the only sites in Southeast Asia where this has occurred. Artists like Syed Ahmad Jamal (1929–2011) and Ahmad Khalid Yusof (1934–1997), amongst others, have also worked with calligraphic expressions in the Malaysian context since the early 1960s. As Iftikhar Dadi has observed, the varied experimentations with calligraphy that place the scriptural tradition of Islam in its modern form occur across geographical and temporal borders.3 “Calligraphic modernism,” to borrow Dadi’s term for this mid-20th century phenomenon, defies the newly emerging nation-state borders of decolonising countries and points to a larger form of affiliation—whether it be of formal aesthetics or religious visual tradition—that is inherently transnational.

Dadi charted a broader constellation of calligraphic modernism, focusing on the developments that took place between 1955 to 1975 in North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia.4 While artists from these regions were mostly unaware of each other’s practices, the sociopolitical contexts of decolonisation and nascent nationalism, as well as critical engagements with metropolitan modernism and cosmopolitanism, underline these parallel developments.5 A similar impetus towards a modern reimagination of calligraphic forms took place in Southeast Asia, a region that has been overlooked in the broader discussion of calligraphic modernism. In Southeast Asia, artists began to engage in critical dialogues with international modernist languages of representation, which they had encountered
during their colonial artistic trainings and subsequent travels and studies to the metropoles. The newly-independent nation-states across Southeast Asia, along with the important position of the region—particularly Bandung—in the international movement of political liberation of the “Third World” also served as the stage for artists’ efforts to create a “new aesthetic of decolonisation.”

The Neglected Dimension represents the first step in developing a more comprehensive research trajectory for artworks, archives and artistic projects relating to Islamic aesthetics in modern and contemporary Southeast Asia. The exhibition features four artists associated with the art training institution in Bandung: Ahmad Sadali (1924–1987), A.D. Pirous (b. 1932), Haryadi Suadi (1938–2016) and Arahmaiani (b. 1962). Formerly known as the Universitaire Leergang voor de Opleiding van Tekenleraren (University Courses for the Education of Art Teachers), the institution was established in 1947 by the Dutch colonial government during the turbulent period of the Indonesian Revolution (1945–1950). As part of the first generation of students at the school, Ahmad Sadali received direct training from Dutch teachers Simon Admiraal (1903–1992) and Marinus Nicolaas (Ries) Mulder (1909–1973). Through the modern art history course, the two teachers directly introduced the formal language of international modernism using the works of European artists—such as the post-impressionist paintings of Paul Cézanne to the scientific cubism and abstraction of Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque and Jacques Villon. After graduating, Sadali was immediately appointed as a lecturer to teach the method and language of abstraction to his colleagues and students, including Pirous, Suadi, and much later, Arahmaiani.

For Sadali and Pirous, modernist abstraction enabled and facilitated artistic expression—informed by the artists’ religious experiences—in the form of calligraphic abstraction. Calligraphic abstraction can be simply defined as a synthesis between modernist abstraction and Islamic calligraphic writing, be it Qur’anic or non-Qur’anic. One can also expand its definition by foregrounding the idea that
the practice of calligraphy does not have to conform to the established conventions, rules, and functions that have developed for centuries across the Islamic world. Calligraphy in this “modern” sense collides with artists’ modernist aesthetics and their renewed and expanded concerns to not only render religious verses in a contemplative manner but also to utilise Arabic script beyond the realm of the religious to bring attention to current social, political, and environmental issues. For artists like Sadali and Pirous, calligraphy and abstraction as methods of knowing exemplify the modern attitude in Islam of activating the Qur’anic verses as the source of knowledge in new ways. Such methods serve as ways to find the essence or “Truth” of the physical and metaphysical worlds. Therefore, calligraphic abstraction exemplifies what Sadali expresses as the fruitful negotiation between Islam and modern science and technology—a manifestation of the artist’s conviction in the congeniality between abstract art and Islam.

On the other hand, the works of Haryadi Suadi and Arahmaiani negotiate modernism and Islam in ways that neither reference the Qur’anic revelations as a source for calligraphic writing nor mediate them through the Western language of abstraction. Suadi’s and Arahmaiani’s works inhabit the porousness of boundaries in Islamic practices and are informed by the persistence of localised, practice-based understandings of Islam. By uncovering new possibilities for expressions of modernity and religiosity, their
artworks potentially disrupt the prominence of calligraphic abstraction as propositioned by Sadali and Pirous and expand the categorical definition of “calligraphic modernism” as introduced by Dadi.

From Script to Abstraction

A.D. Pirous recalls when Sadali began experimenting with incorporating calligraphic writing into his paintings in Bandung in the early 1960s. According to Pirous, Sadali was the first artist to do so in Indonesia, even before Pirous exhibited his calligraphic paintings and prints for the first times at the Chase Manhattan Bank in 1972 and 1976 after he returned from his studies in the United States (US). Sadali’s 1966 painting *Lukisan* (fig. 3) in the National Gallery Singapore collection corroborates Pirous’s memory of Sadali’s. The work was created in the same year that saw the rise of Bandung artists and its formalist aesthetics in the Indonesian exhibitionary space. Lukisan, or “painting,” is an effort by the artist to translate painting for an Indonesian context—it also attempts to make universal the essentialist notion of painting and its supremacy as a medium of abstract modernism; the latter was advocated for by proponents of abstract art in New York between the 1940s and 1950s. After graduating from the art school in Bandung, Sadali studied in New York in the late 1950s at Columbia University and joined the Art Students League. His encounters with New York avant-garde works at the time likely prompted him to delve into color field painting. He began to adopt a more painterly approach to abstraction as shown in his 1960 painting, *Banyuwangi* (fig. 4), which saw him gradually liberating his colours from the confinement of rigid shapes and lines that he learned from Ries Mulder.

On *Lukisan*’s largely abstract field of colors, Sadali has thinly incised Arabic letters—perhaps drawn from the Qur’anic verse—across the yellow and white brushstrokes on the upper part of the painting. While one can make out the letters, it is somewhat difficult to read as the letters show no clear diacritics, while other letters are stripped down...
to their essential form. There is a crude quality to Sadali’s writing—the characters are less refined, more hidden, and have been dissolved in the expressiveness of Sadali’s brushwork and the heavy layers of textures and irregular shapes that form the painting’s horizon. One must get closer to the painting to see the writing clearly, prompting an intimate moment of contemplation. It is perhaps apt that Pirous considers Sadali’s calligraphy as “spiritual graffiti,” which is conspicuously written as a profound contemplation of Sadali’s religiosity.¹³

Sadali’s subtle approach to calligraphic writing contrasts with Pirous’s method of boldly highlighting its expressive quality. One example is the 1970 *Sura Ikhlas* (fig. 5), a work that can be considered a turning point for Pirous. It was the first calligraphic print work that Pirous produced during his two-year fellowship, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, to study printmaking at the Rochester Institute of Technology from 1969 to 1971. Kenneth George notes how Pirous’s turn to calligraphy was inspired by his encounter with works displayed at the Islamic Art gallery at the Metropolitan Art Museum in New York. Looking at objects adorned with calligraphic writings from Persia, North Africa and the Middle East brought Pirous back to his childhood intimacy with Arabic and Jawi scripts, calligraphy, religious-inspired tales—and most importantly—the Islamic visual traditions of Aceh.
Sura Ikhlas shows a rich contrast in textures and colours: there are dynamic calligraphic lines, and a spontaneous, textural quality resulting from the acid used during the printing process, as well as Pirous’s handwriting of a line from the chapter Sura Al-Baqarah at the bottom of the composition. However, the heart of the print is the verses from “Sura Ikhlas”, a chapter concerned with the oneness of God and surrendering to the preeminent One. This work is Pirous’s pledge to work from his heart and put Islam at the center of Indonesia’s and the world’s modern art.

Sura Ikhlas was first exhibited in Indonesia in the Grup 18 exhibition at Dewan Kesenian Jakarta (Jakarta Arts Council) in 1971, which featured eighteen artists affiliated with the art school in Bandung, including Ahmad Sadali and Haryadi Suadi. The title of the exhibition represents the growing number of artists affiliated with the school, a number that had increased from eleven in 1954, 1958 and 1966 to eighteen by 1971. The 1954 exhibition that introduced the eleven Bandung artists at Balai Budaya Jakarta (Jakarta Arts Hall) might be the most well-noted and contentious of these groups shows. The cubist-inspired paintings on display drew criticism stating that and the development of art in Bandung had become *kunstmatig* (Dutch for “artificial”) and unnatural.14 Trisno Soemardjo, a prominent art critic in the 1950s, wrote that art in Bandung was “*mengabdi Laboratorium Barat*” (“in the service of the Western Laboratory”). Soemardjo argued that Western languages of representation could not capture the soul and experience of being Indonesian. Ever since this exhibition, art from Bandung has been positioned as the antithesis of the more “Indonesian” works created by artists in Yogyakarta. Exacerbated by Cold War politics, this polarisation of Bandung and Yogyakarta—between “Westernism” and “Indonesianism”—was driven by the political contestations between rival claimants who disagreed on what could be considered as the modern and authentic national identity for post-independence Indonesia.15

This debate came to a head towards the end of the 1950s when the Old Order regime under President Sukarno aligned
more closely with communist and socialist forces. Art in Bandung was considered the “heir” of Western art styles taught by Dutch imperialists, and artists like Sadali and Pirous were forced to retreat behind the academic walls of the school, particularly from 1960 onwards. When the Cold War in Indonesia practically ended with the repression and annihilation of the left-leaning and communist factions in Indonesian politics, the New Order regime under President Soeharto began to emerge, and artists in Bandung celebrated newfound artistic freedom with the 1966 exhibition. The exhibition became a turning point in the history of Indonesian modern art and soon after, Bandung artists began to dominate the artistic and cultural scenes.

In Grup 18, Pirous’s *Sura Ikhlasm* was exhibited alongside Suadi’s *Kaligrafi* (fig. 7). The latter is an exploration of different calligraphic forms: from delicate lines that loosely reference the fluid and thin incisions of undulating Arabic script and to thick textured lines that seem to draw from pictorial scripts. The two works by Pirous and Suadi set up a contrast between the legible and the illegible, between a calligraphic work that highlights Qur’anic messages and their meanings to instill reflection, and one that complicates and obfuscates the imperative of classical calligraphic texts in meaning-making. This tension between the legible and the illegible fuels ongoing discussions about the “proper” expression of modern Islamic art in Indonesia.

Kenneth George also identifies this tension within Pirous’s calligraphic practice. Two of the works that Pirous created after *Sura Ikhlasm* focus on exploring the expressive qualities of calligraphic forms. One is *Epitaph IV* (fig. 8), which exemplifies Pirous’s return to Acehnese visuality—the work mirrors the textural quality of the inscribed tombstones known as *Batu Aceh* in Islamic Southeast Asia. Many early Islamic tombstones in north Sumatra and the northern Javanese coast are inscribed with detailed and dated epitaphs, offering historical evidence on early Islamic Southeast Asia. The upper half of the composition displays mostly legible inscriptions, bearing the utterance of *tawhid* (Islamic expression of the oneness of God), while the
remaining inscriptions merely resemble Arabic script and are illegible. *Tulisan Merah* (Red Writing) (fig. 9) takes this a step further by stripping the script of any inherent meaning. In this painting, the key compositional element is the contrast between the smooth, flat red field and the highly textured cluster of writings.

Confronted with criticism from the *ulamas* (religious authority) for manipulating a script that many in Indonesia superficially perceive to be sacred, Pirous’s works from
1975 onwards exhibited renewed effort to present “proper” calligraphy, adhering to the expectation of classical calligraphic works. His later works, such as *Surat Isra II: Penghormatan kepada Bunda* (Sura Isra II: Homage to My Mother) (1983), *Subuh* (Dawn) (1980), and *Ya Rabb Dengarkanlah Kami* (Oh God, Please Listen to Us) (1991), demonstrate what George terms as “Qur’anic aesthetics.” In these works, Qur’anic verses “enjoy special focus; scriptural clarity and immutability, and an emphasis on moral reflection and vision usually prevail over self-expressiveness.” Pirous believes that his paintings should reflect his responsibility as a good Muslim to be useful to others and that they should balance both aesthetic and ethical pleasure.

**Between the Sacred and the Illegible**

During the 1980s and 1990s, the canonical imagination of modern Islamic art largely centered around artists whose works demonstrate Qur’anic aesthetics, like Sadali, Pirous, and several others from outside of Bandung. State- and privately-sponsored exhibitions of calligraphy after the inaugural Islamic calligraphy exhibition of 1979 further solidified the canon of modern Islamic art as consisting of works by artists who presented legible renditions of Qur’anic calligraphy. Works that did not fit this category, such as those by Suadi, were often left out of the canon. Suadi’s illegible calligraphy points towards other Islamic textual and visual sources: the Islamic talismanic images and texts known locally in Cirebonese and Malay contexts as *isim* and *rajah*, which may or may not have conformed to the established idea of being “Islamic” in Indonesia at the time. Suadi’s exploration of abstraction also deviated from Western-centric methods and looked towards local technologies, methods and languages of representation that developed in Cirebon and Java, such as glass paintings, shadow puppets, batik, *isim* and *rajah*.

Suadi was born and raised in Cirebon, a port city on the northern coast of Java. He went to study interior design in Bandung in 1959 and transitioned to printmaking in 1964.
when the studio was opened by Mochtar Apin (1903–1994). Much like Meulaboh in Aceh, where Pirous was born, Cirebon is a historical and active port city in the Indian Ocean. As a crucial hub within intra-Asian trade networks, Cirebon’s position was even more prominent than Meulaboh’s in the circulation of spices, textiles and porcelain. The long history of trades and movements of objects, ideas, and images made Cirebon a site of convergence: it absorbed and fashioned foreign cultural forms (Hindu, Buddhist and Islam) into items with distinct Cirebonese characteristics through the long process of translation and transculturation. Suadi’s composites of Cirebonese motifs, materiality and subject matters—particularly in his glass painting works—are material examples of the long history of the Indian Ocean and intra-Asian trades in Cirebon and Java.

When Suadi began working with woodcut prints in the mid-1960s, he came across the *hanga* works of a prominent Japanese printmaker, Shikō Munakata (1903–1975). The expressive and imperfect woodcut lines of varying widths and textures in Suadi’s pieces, as well as the figural motives, demonstrate how deeply Suadi engaged with Munakata’s works. This engagement extended beyond aesthetics as he also looked upon Munakata’s positioning as a Japanese artist in the mid–20th century. Munakata’s *hanga* woodblock prints represent the generation of artists working during Japan’s prewar period in the early 20th century as he returned to Japanese aesthetics and employed the visuality and philosophies of Buddhism, Shintō and animism. Through Munakata, Suadi found a way to articulate his critical standpoint against the imposition of Western discourse on Indonesian modern art: he returned to local aesthetics, which was perceived as contrary to being “modern” at the time by many of his colleagues and art critics. However, I argue that it is precisely Suadi’s rejection of the (Western) modernist tradition—that he had received as part of his artistic training in Bandung—that makes his works and artistic positionality modern.

*Dua Wanita dan Isim* (Two Women and Isim) (fig. 11) juxtaposes the feminine figures with calligraphic writing and expressive
lines, an approach that Munakata also utilised. The Munakata-esque faces in the center of the composition are delineated with simple outlines, while their anthropomorphic bodies are intertwined with, surrounded with, and made up of calligraphic brushstrokes constructed out of the supple and curvilinear lines of Arabic script. Amidst the illegible text below the seated bodies, the Arabic letter wāw (و) is distinctly written.

The print is one of several works by Suadi that uses the term “isim” in its title, referencing the long tradition of Islamic talismanic writings and objects found in Cirebonese and Javanese cultures. “Isim” in Cirebonese translates to Indonesian as “nama Tuhan yang dipakai sebagai doa” (“God’s names used for prayers”)

23 or “kata-kata yang digunakan untuk mencegah penyakit” (“words used to prevent illnesses”),

24 while “rajah” is widely used in the Indonesian and Malay language to denote “writings and images used for talismanic purposes; lines on palms; and images on bodies made by sharp tools; tattoo.”

25 Used almost interchangeably, isim and rajah designate inscriptions, drawings of mythical creatures and geometric designs made on different objects and surfaces to render them as protective, divinatory, and healing devices with magical properties.

26 Talismanic writings are often traditionally difficult to read: the text is intentionally hidden or obscured to guarantee their efficacy. Therefore, the juxtaposition of illegible writings, abstracted figures and sacred talismanic motifs in Suadi’s works profoundly complicates the notion of the sacred and, furthermore, the notion of the “Islamic.” Such imagery pervades many of Suadi’s works and is particularly evident in Suadi’s paintings in this exhibition, such as Buroq (1986), Phrenology (1986) and Untitled (2001).

Suadi is also widely recognised in Indonesia for his role in popularising glass painting as a form of modern artistic practice from 1975 onwards. He learned glass painting from a young Cirebonese glass painter named Rastika (1942–2014) as a method of “returning” to local aesthetics and artmaking practices. In addition to studying the techniques, Suadi also learned the cosmological diagrams, symbols and images
used in Cirebonese glass painting. Many of these elements are said to have been invented by Sufi masters in Cirebon as sacred pictorial manifestations of Sufi doctrines, passed down through generations of glass painters and makers. For this reason, glass painting as a medium contains traces of spiritual and talismanic functions related to Sufi devotional practices, particularly in Cirebon.

Performing Hopes and Collaborative Projects of Reparation

Performativity in calligraphic writing is inherent in many of Sadali’s, Pirous’, and Suadi’s works featured in this exhibition. The lines in calligraphic writing embody the movements of the hand and, perhaps, channel the spiritual getaran (Indonesian for “vibration”) and nafas (Indonesian for “breath, soul, spirit”) that informed the artists and the making of the works. The work Crossing Point by Arahmaiani in this exhibition conceivably encompasses another layer of performativity: the work features flags made of variously coloured fabrics—sewn with colourful Jawi letters and phrases—that have been used as objects of performance. I argue that the calligraphic letters in Crossing Point have the capability to elicit ritual and performative actions similar to how an illumination in religious manuscripts also prompts contemplative or ritual responses.

Crossing Point is one of many iterations of Proyek Bendera (Flag Project), a work first developed in 2006 from Arahmaiani’s collaboration with local communities and students at Pesantren Amumarta, one of the oldest Qur’anic schools in Yogyakarta, following a devastating earthquake that same year. The project has travelled widely and the artist has collaborated with various communities in Yogyakarta, Germany, Singapore, Japan and Tibet, amongst others, to address social, political, religious and environmental issues. In this exhibition, Crossing Point is presented alongside documentation of other works by Arahmaiani, including Stitching the Wound and I LOVE YOU. These videos highlight the artist’s preoccupation with this...
particular mode of performance from 2006 onwards. The installation of colourful Jawi flags contains words such as "tresna," love in Javanese/Balinese), "jujur," honest in Indonesian), "عقل," intellect in Arabic; reason and intellect in Indonesian), "مأوت," death in Arabic and Indonesian), "جنانا," knowledge in Sanskrit), and "أوماه," house, hoe in Javanese), and several others. These words suggest notions of impermanence of the physical world, as well as the importance of a sense of belonging, love, and local knowledge and wisdom.

Arahmaiani’s preoccupation with Jawi script emerged early on in her career with her painting Lingga-Yoni (1993) which, along with her other installation works, sparked accusations of blasphemy from a reactionary and fundamentalist Muslim group during her 1994 solo exhibition at Studio Oncor in Jakarta. The juxtaposition of Jawi writing with sacred pre-Islamic iconography of the lingga and yoni was regarded as profane, resulting in a death threat against Arahmaini that forced her to flee Indonesia for Australia. Since then, Arahmaiani has been moving from one place to another to live, work and engage with diverse communities.

The use of words from various origins demonstrates the flexibility of Jawi, a permutation of the Arabic script prevalent across many parts of Islamic Southeast Asia. Jawi was gradually pushed to the margins of modernity after the introduction of the Latin script through the colonial education system during the late-19th and early-20th centuries across the British Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies. The continual erasure of Jawi in modern Southeast Asia led to the loss of the collective memories and knowledge systems, and a sense of connectedness between the Muslim communities across the Indo-Malay Archipelago. Furthermore, it exacerbated the already tenuous relationship that Muslim communities in the region had with Arabic script, as its use was increasingly confined to the realm of the religious and the sacred. In 2019, Mulaika Hijjas notes how Jawi became the site of identitarian and religious politics in Malaysia due to the fact that the script had become synonymous with Islam and “Malayness.”
By inscribing flags with Jawi words and concepts from diverse socio-cultural origins for *Crossing Point* and many of her other installations and performances, Arahmaiani liberates the script from its purported religious associations and political uses. By employing Jawi in this way, Arahmaiani hopes to showcase the script’s capacity to facilitate transcultural and trans-religious dialogues amongst different communities. Arahmaiani elaborates:

The main topic of my work is cultural dialogue between the Islamic world and the rest of the world within the context of today’s consumer society. My idea is to re-think the economic-politic-social and cultural system through community-based art-projects. My installations and performances examine power relations and their dynamics while also focusing on the situation, condition, rights and responsibilities of minorities. This is an on-going project involving different communities in different parts of the world. The project’s main goal is to bring people of different cultural and social backgrounds together, encouraging them to share, exchange, work in collaboration and see each other’s view-point so that each can better understand the other. The project also addresses current issues experienced on a more personal level by community members. The work aims to find solutions to problems using the values of democratic thinking and by approaching issues from alternative and sometimes critical perspectives.29

Arahmaiani adds that the use of Jawi to articulate concerns, hopes and local wisdom of different communities also serve to carry out a reparative project for the harmful image of Islam circulated in global, Western-centric media.30

**Conclusion**

*The Neglected Dimension* presents the different aesthetics and ethical negotiations undertaken by artists in Indonesia through their explorations of calligraphy, abstraction and performance. The works of Sadali and Pirous have been
critical in framing the discourse on modern Islamic art—and their practices of calligraphic abstraction are also often regarded as the most appropriate expressions of modern Islamic art in Indonesia and the region. On the other hand, Suadi’s and Arahmaiani’s works deconstruct and redefine the boundaries of the “modern” and the “Islamic” by foregrounding localised forms and understandings of Islam in Southeast Asia; their works challenge superficial and stereotypical representations and imaginings of Islam in global media. The diverse approaches to questions of modernity and religiosity proposed by these four artists expand and complicate both the expressions of modernity and the genealogies of modernism in Southeast Asia.
NOTES

5 Dadi, “Rethinking Calligraphic Modernism,” 95.
6 Dadi, “Rethinking Calligraphic Modernism,” 96.
8 From Script to Abstraction is part of the title of one of the exhibitions that introduced Indonesian modern and contemporary art to an international audience. Organised by The Royal Society of Fine Arts in Amman, Jordan in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Culture, Republic of Indonesia, it took place from December 1996 to January 1997. The exhibition largely showed the works of Bandung artists, including artists who worked with calligraphic expression and different forms of abstraction. Furthermore, the exhibition articulated the continued primacy of Bandung artists and calligraphic abstraction in the development of modern Indonesian art during the final years of the New Order period in the 1990s.
10 A.D. Pirous, interview with the author, February 2018.
12 It is rather difficult to make out the writing, but Zulfadhli Hilmi, who worked closely on this painting with Eugene Tan for the 2016 Reframing Modernism exhibition in Singapore, identified the writing as a quote from the Qur’anic chapter, Al-Baqarah verse 255. See Eugene Tan,”Ahmad Sadali,” in Reframing Modernism: Paintings from Southeast Asia, Europe, and Beyond, eds. Sarah Lee and Sara Siew (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2016), 236–237.
Claire Holt cites the observation of an Indonesian observer who remarked that without Bandung, “…Jogja’s ‘Indonesianism’ might never have been formulated. Jogja’s quest for ‘nationalism in art,’ he thought, was less a positive conviction and more a reaction to the intellectualism and estheticism of the Bandung painters, to the unmistakable influence of a Dutch teacher, a reaction, in fact, to Bandung’s westernism.” Claire Holt, *Art In Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), 238. Similar political contestations occurred in many newly independent nations in Southeast Asia. Tony Day and Maya Liem’s volume on the cultural expressions in Southeast Asia during the Cold War period provides a comparative lens by including essays from scholars on the development of art in the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, and Malaya. See Tony Day and Maya Ht. Liem, eds., *Cultures at War: The Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2010).

Correspondence between But Muchtar and Claire Holt, May 24, 1967. Claire Holt papers, #14-27-2648. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

George and Mamannoor, *A.D. Pirous*.


George and Mamannoor, *A.D. Pirous*, 60.

Mochtar Apin (1923–1994), alongside Ahmad Sadali, is a member of the first generation of Bandung artists. In addition to painting, Apin is also recognised for his printmaking practice. In 1947, Apin and Baharudin Mara Sutan created several prints for a print album to commemorate Indonesian independence. The albums were distributed to several countries, including the Netherlands. It currently resides at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, while another edition can be found in the collection of the National Gallery Singapore.

*Hanga*, a word that translates to “block/plate picture” or “printed picture,” became a concept reflecting Japanese modernity and emphasis on individual creativity in the early twentieth century. Shikō Munakata began to work with woodblock print in the late 1920s and ’30s when Japanese Creative Prints, or *sōsaku hanga*, often shortened as *hanga*, emerged as a distinct category of modern and creative art in Japan. Munakata’s works represent the development of hanga in the 1930s and ’50s.

Oliver Statler, “Shikō Munakata,” in *The Woodblock and the Artists: The Life and Work of Shikō Munakata*, ed. Munemichi...

23 T.D. Sudjana, Kamus Bahasa Cirebon (Bandung: Humaniora, 2005), 117.


26 For more details on Islamic talismans in Malay context, see Farouk Yahya, Divination in Malay Illustrated Manuscripts, 2016.

27 The terms “getaran” and “nafas” are often used by artists, art critics, curators and writers discussing artworks and the practice of modern Islamic art in Indonesia from the 1970s onwards in essays and reviews in exhibition catalogues and periodicals. The two terms often refer to the infusion of spirituality and devotional feelings in the works of artists who worked with calligraphic abstraction. The word “getaran” in this context implies a subtle vibration that can only be felt when one is fully immersed in deep contemplation to feel the Divine presence. The term “nafas” in its active form “bernafaskan” has been used since the 1950s in discussions and manifestos relating to Islamic art(s) and literature (Prawira 1956; Kratz 1986). In 1991, “bernafaskan” was foregrounded in the state-approved slogan for the 1991 Festival Istiqlal, “Festival Kebudayaan yang Bernafaskan Islam” (Festival of Indonesian Culture that Breathes Islam). Nafas in this slogan implies the idea of “breathing in” or incorporating something external, outside of the body, into the self, in an instrumental way.


30 Arahmaian, in conversation with the author, March 2018.
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_________. Claire Holt Papers, #14-27-2648. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.


