



アナク・クラカトゥ山/Anak Krakatau



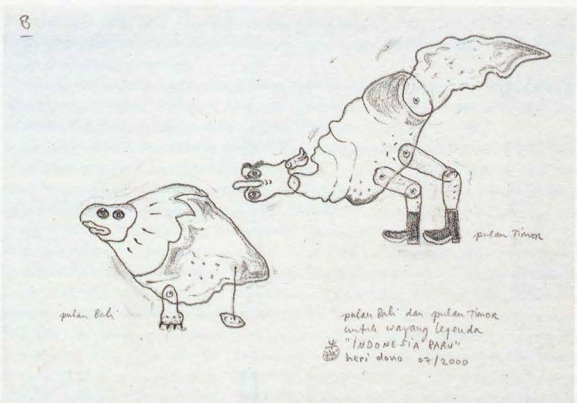
スラウェシ/Sulawesi



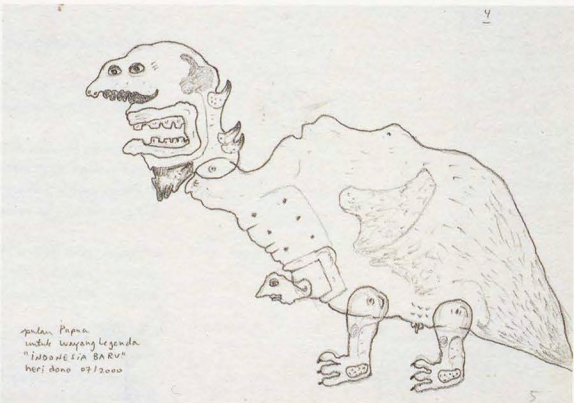
スマトラ/Sumatera



カリマンタン(ボルネオ)/Kalimantan



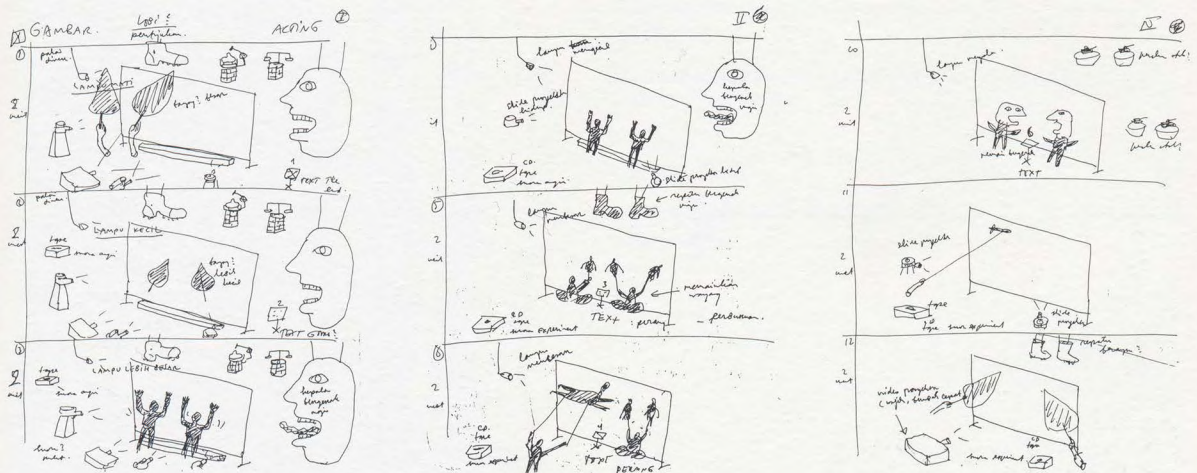
バリとティモール/Bali and Timor



パプア/Papua



パフォーマンス《ロビ・ロビ》のためのスケッチ/Sketch for Performance "Lobi Lobi"/2000



パフォーマンス「ロビ・ロビ」——思想的背景

このパフォーマンスは実は伝統的影絵芝居と同じものであるが、制作手法はアニメーションや映画と同じものと言える。その上にすべての具象を映し出し視覚化するスクリーンは、ここでは必要不可欠な媒体である。シンプルな考えではあるが、ワヤン影絵芝居が生み出された時代から現代に至るまで、ブラウン管であれ、映画館、コンピューター、スライド、ビデオ、ゲームなど人々はスクリーンという媒体を依然として必要としているように感じられる。

このパフォーマンスで使われるワヤン人形はリゲル・ワヤンと呼ばれるが、これは遺伝子操作人形という意味である。ここで理想的人間像は歪められ、本来の人間の姿がよりシンボリックに表現される。しかし、これら人形のキャラクターも突然変異やクローニングによって伝統やそれまで彼らに付与していた記号から解放され、ワヤンのストーリーや姿は映画のスターウォーズにまで至る。

簡単に言えば、このコンセプトは人類が猿から始まったとするダーウィンの進化論と似たものである。この理論には小断があり、サルとワヤン人形はともに足より腕のほうが長いことから明らかに、我々の祖先は最初サルだったが、その後ヒトになり、その後ワヤン人形になったというものだ。

《ロビ・ロビ》のストーリーはインドネシア総選挙の最中にコメンテーターやレポーターが盛んにロビー（交渉）の意味でロビ・ロビと言っていたことに発想を得た。それまで私が知っていたロビ・ロビと言えば、葡萄の一種の酸っぱい木の実でフルーツサラダに添えるものだった。

《ロビ・ロビ》は個人または集団の欺瞞が「民族と国家のため」というレトリックのもと、隠され温存されているインドネシアの民主制度への批判のひとつである。民衆の生活は力の論理によって壊されてゆく、正義、真実、法律といったパラダイムの信号が壊れてしまったからだろう。

(ヘリドノ)



Performance: Lobi Lobi – Conceptual Background:

In fact, this performance resembles the traditional *wayang kulit*, except that the technique employed resembles that of an animated cartoon or film.

The screen, where all images and pictures appear, is a vital component of the medium. In simple terms, from the first *wayang* performance until now, an audience needs a screen in order to witness images, whether members of that audience watch television, cinema, computer images, slides or "games."

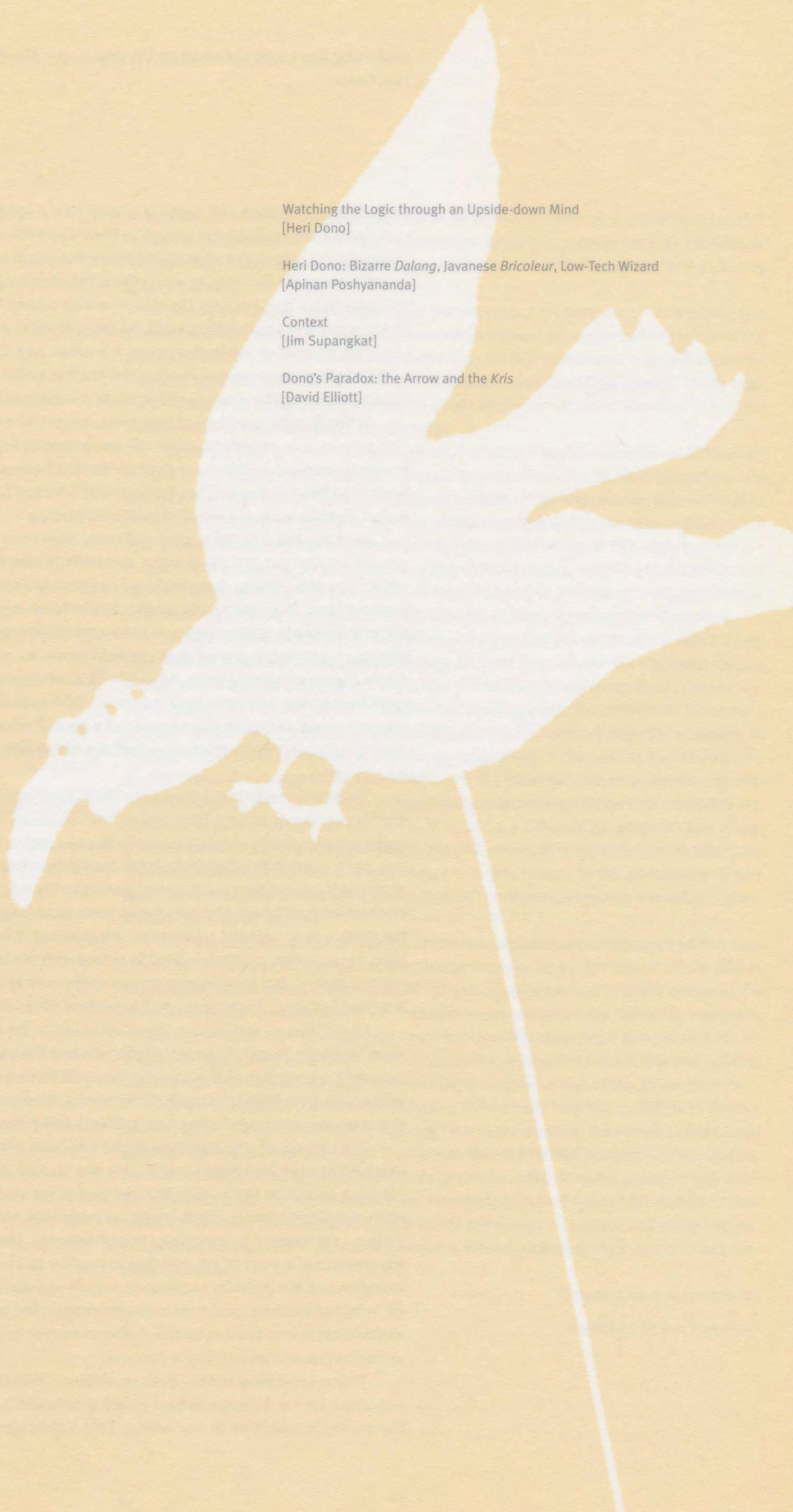
In this performance, the *wayang* puppets employed are referred to as "*wayang REGEN*." The latter word is an acronym for *Rekayasa Genetika*, or Genetic Engineering. This refers to the fact that the ideal human figure is distorted or translated into a visual language that has a profound symbolic significance. However, the background of the characters of this *wayang* has also been transformed by the addition of figures from outside the tradition. These *REGEN* figures are mutants, similar in appearance and character to figures from *Star Wars*.

In simple language, the concept is similar to the theory of Evolution propounded by Sir Charles Darwin, who created a scandal with his implication that humans are descended from apes. According to one anecdote, our ancestors evolved from monkeys into humans, who then evolved into *wayang* puppets. One similarity between monkeys and *wayang* puppets is that the length of their arms is longer than the length of their legs.

The *Lobi Lobi* stories are inspired by an actual situation that occurred in the general election period, when commentators and reporters often referred to the large number of emerging lobbies. However, for me the word "lobby" means something else. In my language, "lobby" is a kind of extremely sour grape that is used in *rujak bebek*, a local dish.

The *Lobi Lobi* are a form of criticism of the democratic system in Indonesia, where hypocritical personal or communal values are hidden behind the rhetorical expression "For Our Nation." The human life force is oppressed by the logic of force rather than the logic of intellect, perhaps because the paradigm for justice, truth and law is not operating properly.

(Heri Dono)



Watching the Logic through an Upside-down Mind
[Heri Dono]

Heri Dono: Bizarre *Dalang*, Javanese *Bricoleur*, Low-Tech Wizard
[Apinan Poshyananda]

Context
[Jim Supangkat]

Dono's Paradox: the Arrow and the *Kris*
[David Elliott]

Watching the Logic through an Upside-down Mind
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Watching the Logic through an Upside-down Mind

Heri Dono

First of all, I have read and seen for myself how a society's system of thinking can be engineered using ideas expressed as their opposite. If we examine the situation in Indonesia at present, the appropriate metaphor might be that of viewing the process of creation of a glass painting, in which the artist must create a mirror image of the picture he wants to portray, because the picture will be viewed from the other side of the glass. Only by creating a mirror image will the artist present a true picture to the viewers.

This reversal of the truth through a process popularly known as "twisted logic" is an interesting phenomenon, in which the truth as defined by normal logic is reversed or contradicted, but the result is nonetheless a version of the "truth."

In the dominant culture of Indonesia, almost all issues are characterized by dualism, paradox and ambiguity. In this culture, humanity lives in an animated cartoon world in which people are little more than cardboard figures. Basically, the driving spiritual force in society is animism. The fundamental principle of animism, that every object has a soul, is reflected in the world of animated fantasy.

In an animated cartoon, each and every object can move and become alive. A chair can get up and run, a drop of water can smile, a tree can dance or even fly. The most unlikely events, events that would be completely impossible in the real world, seem commonplace in an animated cartoon. Similarly, events that would seem impossible in the real world are commonplace in Indonesia. Anything is possible. There are many examples. For instance, a president can hold power for 30 years without accumulating a single cent in personal wealth. A large individual can mysteriously disappear without a trace from prison, and even from Indonesia. With even less difficulty, enormous sums of money can mysteriously disappear from a bank. Perhaps, in this case, the disappearance is facilitated by the relatively small size of the banknotes compared to the size of a human being.

The phenomena that I have described above are commonplace, proving that absurdity represents its own form of the truth. However, it is extremely difficult to distinguish between those events that really happen and those that are created by rumor. It was particularly difficult to distinguish reality from falsehood through the mass media or through educational institutions, particularly under the Suharto regime, when the strength of prohibition and censorship were so strong that the only way to determine the truth was to witness an event as it happened, from close up. During this period, news reports were routinely edited to accord with the interests of the government. During this period, the favorite expression of the power holders was: "In the interest of National Stability." In this fashion, life became increasingly convoluted.

I have worked with many other individuals in the creative process, most of whom were "ordinary people." The installation art and the performances that I have created, including my version of the *wayang*, have all involved the input of a wide variety of individuals, from friends involved in electronics, mechanics, construction, crafts and various arts, and others, including *becak* drivers and grave diggers.

The process of creating these works has been particularly interesting when it has involved intense interaction in the form of a mutual dialog. Artistic paradigm and expression unique to the locality become part of the work. If I create a work of art using either simple or advanced technology, my purpose is not to display the technology used. Rather, I am inspired by my conception of animism. The theme or basic concept behind the creation of a work of art, whether innovative or inventive, is born out of a personal situation and the need for expression. I don't use voice or movement in painting, but I do in installation art, performances and videos. The art that I create is not merely an exploration in creative aesthetics. I also endeavor to awaken a new awareness in my audience through an interactive process.

Themes involving society, politics, violence, militarism and other similar issues are important for me. I recognize that an artist occupies a unique position as a witness of the period in which he or she works. This role is particularly important because in

Indonesia, education serves the purpose of perpetuating ignorance rather than enlightening the nation. In the Indonesian educational system, concepts such as intellectual freedom and personal development have no place. Education is a means for inculcating ignorance.

Through an interactive relationship, the process of creating a work of art becomes the medium for viewing the differences between various paradigms of thought and the means by which a non-academic orientation can provide enrichment in an informal context that nonetheless allows for the spread and socialization of the concept to the ordinary viewer. This can develop a prospect of life in the formation of the structure of the middle class, a class still weak in Indonesia.

In the process of creating a work of art, I often use traditional elements. My audience is often intimately familiar with these elements. However, these elements are not placed in the structure defined by traditional patrons of the arts. Rather, these elements are used because they are more capable of representing a dialectical local expression and of communicating the individual perceptions of the artist. In this regard, tradition forms a vital catalyst in an essential, ongoing cultural dialog. In this light, tradition and the traditional arts are not something to be preserved in a museum. Rather, I believe that tradition and the traditional arts are capable of being developed and created.

In the Brinjarjo Market in Yogyakarta, traders sell old electronic goods side by side with the sellers of traditional medicines. If I want to purchase the electronic goods, the seller will ask me how many kilograms I would like to buy. In my book, these electronic goods can be categorized as traditional. In my opinion, the problem of contemporary art can be traced semiotically through a traditional methodology. For example, in the traditional Chinese system of treatment, reflexology, if the patient has a headache or other disorder elsewhere in his or her body, the treatment takes place through the nerve centers located in his foot. It is generally acknowledged that contemporary art, particularly contemporary art from Asia, is ruled by a different paradigm to that which governs Western culture. For example, in the philosophy of perspective in the West, the distinction between the Subject and Object is clearly drawn. In the philosophy of perspective in Asia, there is no such distinction. In the Mandala system, the subject is assumed to be all-pervasive.

The significance of the difference in the two approaches is represented in a concrete fashion by the design of the Borobudur temple, or by the layout of the city of Yogyakarta, which places the *kraton* both physically and spiritually at the center of the consciousness of the community. The installation art and several of the performances in which I have been involved are also inspired by a Mandala-type perspective. As an artist, I recognize that an artist plays an important role in society as a social and political control, representing a viewpoint that may be at odds with that of the government's.

My work, *Bidadari* (*Flying Angels*) (1996, cat.no.8) was inspired by the *Flash Gordon* stories, created long before Neil Armstrong flew to the moon in the Apollo 11 spacecraft and took his first step on the moon. This proves that the human imagination and inspiration can be inspired by symbols and events dating to well before the period in which the artist operates. For me, the *Bidadari* is an extremely personal symbol of freedom of conscience, replacing the Garuda symbol that has been used as a symbol of collective ideology and propaganda to prevent individuals from developing their intellect and personality freely.

Yogyakarta, 5 August 2000

(translated by Tom Kortschak)

fig.1 (p.15)

Heri Dono, scenes from *The Drunkenness of Semar*,
10 December 1995, performance at Freud's Arts Café,
Oxford, U.K.

"Semar is a God from Hindu stories, he is a man, but she is a woman. (S)he smiles but s(he) cries. In the story he eats the moon and then can't get it back out again, so when (s)he speaks, (s)he speaks in symbols, in symbolic meanings. Although a God (s)he lives with common people. (S)he is a wise joker who criticizes those in power using symbols and allegories, all phrased in the language of the people, giving them wisdom. Unlike the traditional story, I show Semar when (s)he is drunk, without wisdom anymore. In this condition, Semar can be appropriated by the authorities and turned into a devil, they can pretend to have Semar's sober wisdom. Thus a dictator can seem to be a man of the people."

—Heri Dono, *The Drunkenness of Semar*, at Freud's Arts Café, Oxford, U.K., 10 December 1995.¹

fig.2 (p.15)

Wayang kulit, Semar

fig.3 (p.15)

Wayang kulit, Arjuna

Playing with Shadows

Semar is a symbol of the guardian spirit of all Javanese and perhaps the most important figure in the shadow-puppet play (*wayang kulit*). Semar, Petruk, and Gareng are the three great low clowns who are constant companions of the Pendawas (Skt: Pandava), the five famous hero brothers adapted from the Indian epic *Mahabharata* and placed in a Javanese setting. Semar is actually a god and the brother of Siva, king of all gods. Many oppositions seem to meet in the character of Semar, who is both god and clown, most refined inwardly but clumsy and falstaffian in appearance. Semar has been compared to Sir John Falstaff, the gross and funny character in William Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry IV*.² Both figures provide the reminder that no completely adequate and comprehensive world is possible because the sense for the irrationality of human life remains. In a *wayang* story, Siva makes an attempt to bring peace between the Pendawas and the Korawas (Skt: Kuru) but is opposed by Semar. Arjuna, one of the five Pendawa hero brothers, is instructed by Siva to kill Semar, whom he loves. Although ashamed when Semar finds out, Arjuna persists in the duty assigned to him by Siva in order to end the eternal struggle. Realizing Arjuna's commitment, Semar burns himself, but instead of dying, transforms into his godly form and defeats his brother, Siva. Consequently, the war between the two sides of humans begins again.

The *wayang kulit* is not simply a form of entertainment by causing flat, painted leather cutouts, or shadow puppets, to cast large shadows on a white screen. These celebrated shadow puppets of Java have their origins in the ancient belief that shadows are the manifestations of ancestral spirits. Their rich cultural and literary heritage, together with diversified forms of music, dance, and drama, have created bonds of mutual appreciation among Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists for centuries. As a deeply rooted and highly sophisticated art form, the *wayang* expresses the Javanese etiquette, which is focused on the depths of the self as pure *rasa* (*rasa* is the inward-looking world-view borrowed from the Indian concept, with emphasis on "feeling" and "meaning").³ It is believed that the enlightened person must keep psychological equilibrium and maintain placid stability. As part of Javanese ethics, it is not important to strive for happiness but to reach the psychological state of inner stillness, to become like a pool of clear water, a limpid pool to the bottom of which one can easily see. Not surprisingly, the mystical and ethical ideology of the *wayang* is still widely appreciated among Indonesians. Stories represent the connection between man and the universe, the micro- and the macrocosmos, the eternal struggle of nature against time and never-ending battles between good and evil.⁴

The *wayang* has been seen as a historical and moral code by which comparisons and judgments can be made on the present. The stories in the *wayang*, with polite speeches and violent wars, have been compared to modern international relations, in that talks by diplomats prevail and bring peace, but fighting erupts when the talks break down. As the *wayang* is popular among the Javanese people, it has been used as means for indirect and allusive suggestion, which is so important in Javanese communication and social intercourse. The adaptation of *wayang* for educating the people has rendered

traditional values and concepts in new form. For example, the *wayang pantjasila*, based on the five principles laid down for the foundation of the Republic, has been devised to educate the masses in the modern concepts of democracy and nationhood. Conversely, different kinds of *wayang* have been used as allegorical vehicle to praise or criticize leading figures in the community. In *wayang revolusi*, events of the Indonesian struggle of independence (1945-49) are depicted with Sukarno and his followers as revolutionary heroes while the Dutch invaders are presented as evil forces.⁵

Social criticism related to contemporary events, political gossip, and local rumors is commonly inserted into a *wayang* performance. As the audience views the sophisticated traditional art forms, they are reminded by the puppeteer (*dalang*) of common events including party election, economic crisis, natural disaster, and village gossip. The *dalang* makes an astonishing virtuoso performance as he manipulates the *wayang*, directs the *gamelan* orchestra, and narrates the story.

Yogya: The Art Mecca of Java

Yogyakarta (Yogya) is situated at the very core of the ancient region where the first great Javanese Mataram empires flourished. The area contains a formidable legacy of Indonesian cultural heritage. It embraces several stunning Buddhist monuments and Hindu temples from the 8th to the 10th centuries such as Borobudur and Prambanan. Despite its rapid transformation, Yogyakarta's attractions are the ancient sites, the royal palace complex (*kraton*), the court dances, and the *wayang* and batik workshops. Visitors appreciate both the serenity and austerity of the royal courtyards (*pendopo*) trapped in a timeless era. At the *sasana inggil* performance pavilion, the full eight-hour presentation of *wayang kulit* can still be experienced. Yet Yogyakarta, with its sprawling village-like neighborhoods, is not just about the ancient past. Tourism has increased exploitation of tradition and indigenous Javanese-ness, but at the same time it has boosted the income and livelihood of the Yogyakartaans. On Jalan Malioboro (Garland-Bearing Street), the bustling avenue is lined with houses with Dutch-decor facades displaying advertisements for such products as Lucky Strike and Marlboro. Shops and vendors sell batik, woven goods, bronzes, T-shirts, and wooden *wayang* masks. On the busy pavements, one could find all kinds of goods—ranging from fake Rolexes and cheap cell phones to dried crocodile penises as aphrodisiacs and medicinal herbs to cure migraines.

Noticeably, in Yogyakarta, the forces of modernization and globalization are not as intense as in Jakarta or Bali. Strong links with the traditions of pre-modern times are still evident as sultanate and Islamic ceremonies mingle. As the center of nationalist movement in the late 1940s, Yogyakarta has remained a symbolic and traditional place of activism and independence.⁶ When president Sukarno came to power, several important artists, including Soedjojono, Affandi, and Hendra Gunawan, became active as members of the Young Painters of Indonesia (Seniman Indonesia Muda) in Yogyakarta. They believed that an art-for-the-people approach could serve Sukarno's philosophy to combine the elements of nationalism, communism, and Islam. For example, Hendra Gunawan became a member of LEKRA (Institute of People's Culture), a leftist organization affiliated with the Communist party.⁷ The ASRI (Academi Seni Rupa Indonesia) art academy founded in 1950 (later became known as the Indonesia Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta) produced artists whose style related to expressive and social realism, reflecting the struggle against oppression and socio-economic inequality. After Sukarno's fall from power in 1965, socially active artists were suppressed, imprisoned, or changed their style. Instead of themes of everyday life, artists preferred depicting traditional subjects inspired by temple and epic scenes. It was during the 1970s that the Indonesian New Art Movement (Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru), formed by artists from Yogyakarta, Jakarta, and Bandung, called for an art that reflected the entire spectrum of society. Among many happenings and performances in Yogyakarta, political satire and cynical commentary were aimed at the government. Authorities began to suspect many artists of involve-

fig.4 (p.16)
Jalan Malioboro, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2000

fig.5 (p.16)
Man selling dried crocodile penis, Yogyakarta,
Indonesia, 1999

ment in leftist groups and feared a revival of “Sukarnoism.” Artists such as Semsar Siahaan, Hardi, and Munni Ardi overtly expressed themselves against president Suharto and his policies.⁸ As an inspiring place for art activities Yogyakarta has long been residence for renowned artists including Affandi (deceased), Djoko Pekik, Dadang Christanto (recently moved to Darwin), Lucia Hartini, Ivan Sagito, and Nindityo Adipurnomo. During 1997-98, Yogyakarta was among the explosive places where political rallies and student demonstrations against Suharto took place. Art students burned the effigies of Suharto while banners and posters of the late Sukarno appeared on the Jalan Malioboro.

Into Heri Dono's “Savage” Mind and “Ha-Ha” Logic

I have encountered works by Heri Dono at various places from Jakarta, Bangkok, Tokyo, Fukuoka, Brisbane, Kwangju, and Taipei to Vancouver, New York, Bordeaux, and Vienna. Dono's works never fail to stimulate, arouse, and provoke the viewers to share his vision of a world full of humor and irony. Yet, it is in his tiny studio tucked away among the rows of houses on the Ronodigdayan street behind the cinema and former military barracks in Yogyakarta that one can fully appreciate Dono's complex and exhilarating imagination.⁹ The cramped, dimly-lit rooms are in disarray, with objects strewn all over the place. Cartoon-like paintings depict gods and animals in garish colors; mannequins are scattered, with arms missing, breasts exposed, and penises erect; fiberglass heads with bulging glass eyes wear helmets and gas masks; old TV sets lie broken on the floor; newspaper clips of Sukarno and Megawati Sukarnoputri are stuck on the walls; from the ceiling, flying angels hover with electronic circuit hearts; a toy monkey rides a vehicle on the ladder with his head turned upside down. The atmosphere inside Dono's home vacillates between junk shop, second-hand toy store, and mechanical inventor's laboratory.

Eccentricity and the bizarre seem to be synonymous with Dono's character. Hilarity and absurdity also come to mind. Conversation with Dono is full of word play, mimicry, parody, and double entendre. These elements appear everywhere in his works. For Dono, laughter is not the means to deflect social embarrassment but a healing agent. Not surprisingly, through his works, numerous images of laughter can be experienced. He wrote that laughter “includes ugliness around and within us, the absurdity of ourselves and others, and the beasts with which we populate our internal and external worlds.”¹⁰ Dono seems to communicate freely with his objects as if they have spirits and can talk back to him. They become his friends, cousins, and compatriots. By entering Dono's personal world, commonsense perspectives break down. Instead, logical fallacies, obsessive playfulness, a pluralism of styles and an eclectic mixture of related and unrelated concepts are freely explored.

Interest in mythical thought by Dono can be seen as an intellectual form of *bricolage*. Claude Lévi-Strauss introduced the notion of *bricolage* in his work, *The Savage Mind* (1962), indicating that it has quality of improvisation and a level of contingency. A *bricoleur* utilizes residual elements the same way as myths operate. Through *bricolage*, new signs are created. But these signs do not relate exclusively to themselves. The term *bricolage* can be traced back to the French word *bricole* (meaning “putting things together in a manner of improvisation”) and the Italian word *bricola* (meaning “one who breaks”).¹¹ Therefore, it is essential to appreciate that the milieu of the *bricoleur* as the choice of his *bricolage* can imply the creation of new signs and the breaking open of already existing signs. If Dono is seen as a *bricoleur* then his creativity and subversiveness of Indonesian traditions must be simultaneously appreciated.

Heri Dono's work implies a number of ways of interpretation. Hence, it would be a mistake to view Dono and his art as only modes of expression and reflections of savage and primitive thought. Caution should be taken not to simplistically project Dono's work as functional, ceremonial, and ritualistic in a primitive/exotic setting. Having the influence of *wayang*, Batak folk tales, and the cultures of Sumatra and Irian Jaya does not

fig. 6 (p.17)
Heri Dono in his studio, Ronodigdayan Street,
Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2000

fig. 7 (p.18)
Sight around Heri Dono's studio, Ronodigdayan Street,
Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2000

fig.8 (p.19)
Heri Dono, *Spraying Mosquitoes and Smoking*, 1985

mean that Dono's work simply falls in the category of primitive and tribal art. Assumption that his work is raw, untamed, and threatening, and therefore should be designated to art inspired by the savage mind, would be a misconception. In context of primitivism, Dono's art may allude to tribal objects, but it is not "primitivist." His interest in the subaltern, the homeless, and underprivileged children allows his work to be enriching and reciprocal with the public. Conversely, some of Dono's paintings reveal affinities with works by European masters such as Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, and Paul Klee.¹² Dono freely appropriates and mixes them with indigenous and local contents. This does not mean that these inspirations have to be compartmentalized into direct influences, coincidental resemblance, and basic shared characteristics.¹³ The method of juxtaposition of images by Western scholars like Kirk Varnedoe to determine affinities between modern art and primitivism such as Paul Gauguin's *We Hail Thee Mary* (1891) and reliefs at Borobudur depicting the meeting of an Ajivaka monk can be limiting.¹⁴ In case of European masters, the affinities of their work to tribal and primitive art from Papua New Guinea, Tahiti, the Congo, Zaire, and Irian Jaya are highly praised. The fact that these scholars perceive the idea that the primitive "looks like" the modern is ironic. In the case of contemporary artists from non-Western civilizations, like Dono, frequently, the preconception by critics and art historians of direct influence and derivation of modern Western masters tends to override the fact that these artists are free to choose and select from countless sources.¹⁵

Dono's curious hybrids fall in the zone of intersection, mediation, and cross-pollination between cultures. His *Spraying Mosquitoes and Smoking* (1985) appears to be inspired by Miró, with its strange comical monsters, spiky claws, and twisted bodies. Primitivism of the subconscious in Miró's paintings has been related to the child cult, free drawing, sign language, and graffiti.¹⁶ In discussing Picasso's work, Dono said that he particularly admires *Guernica* (1937). Dono could have mixed and combined all these elements in addition to his interest in *wayang* and Batak's tribal woodcarvings of mystical patterns and mythical creatures. Open, gnawing mouths and snapping fangs in numerous works such as *The Suppressor* (1989, cat.no.1) and *Where is My Head?* (1994, cat.no.2) indicate something sinister and frightening. Aside from his biting satire about society's hypocrisy and absurdity, some might relate signs of violence and death to animism and cannibalism of the Bataks. Myths and stories such as the three megalithic complexes in Ambarita, Sumatra, including a cannibal's breakfast table—for which prisoners' decapitated heads were chopped up, cooked with buffalo meat, and drunk with blood by *rajas*—are sources that are far removed from the "primitive" works of Picasso, Miró, and Klee.¹⁷ Dono's syncretism of indigenous contents might result in making his works to look sinister, but their humor and hilarity evoke drama and tragic comedy on stage.

Benedict Anderson has observed that in Indonesia political communication through direct speech by means of discussion, rumors, gossip, and arguments is essential.¹⁸ Its fluid and ephemeral nature is contrasted with the symbolic speech expressed through cartoons, films, and advertisements. For example, Anderson discusses political cartoons by Sibarani, whose sharply humorous and eerie characters hark back to his Batak ancestors with their reputation for being sinister and frightening (*serem*). The powerful and rough-hewn style of Sibarani's cartoons is accessible to the mass public. Iconographic density and caricatures of former vice-president Mohammad Hatta and the Masyumi leader Mohammad Natsir could be deciphered among Indonesian readers. Although Dono is not directly inspired by Sibarani's work, he recognizes the potential of cartoons and comic art as methods that can be employed to penetrate the opacity of socio-political order. In his statement, "Life is Cartoon," Dono expresses that rationality and logic are very limited; the need to listen to nonsense has gained much interest.¹⁹ Through irony and humor, critical messages are implied under the layering of symbolic elements. Critiques of political figures and sensitive issues are disguised behind shad-