

Foreword for *Coretan: Recent Works by Yunizar* Exhibition

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'... if you were to insist, then I would have to lie to you. I don't want to lie!' They laughed, they laughed as though they understood my thoughts. – Yunizar

The '*coretan*' paintings by Yogya based artist Yunizar, a series which began from the late 1990s, may be said to be frustratingly elusive, delightfully enigmatic. These works are composed of illegible scribbling, rendered in lines repeated across the canvas. The scribbling appears as fragments of text, a diarylike parchment of thoughts that struggles to find form or intelligible representation. The artist himself had divested the agency of reading to prospective audiences, unwilling to provide markers that limit perspectives.

Contextualised against the broad history of Indonesian painting, particularly practices in Yogya, which privileges the narratives of nation, society and culture – and predicated by various contingencies of history, politics, ideology and activism, punctuated at the end by the *Reformasi* struggle of 1998 – these works seem more problematic. Do they, in part, represent newer political and cultural attitudes one may associate with the post *Reformasi* generation of artists? That is, do they represent a breakdown between ideology and art, or a growing sense of political disenchantment? Or should we burden Yunizar with the weight of an anthropological reading, an association perhaps to the folk literary tradition comparable to the Indonesian poet Sutardji Calzoum Bachri's use of mantra to dissociate words from the 'burden of meanings' and privileging their aural and ritualistic qualities? Or can we advance a theoretical reading of the works relating forms of engagement with abstraction or paths of abstraction, not in the Greenberg sense of the eventual displacement of the figure from the painterly surface, but rather, as ways to broaden the limits of expression and interpretation beyond 'representation'? This is indeed significant if abstraction here is to be regarded – borrowing from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari – as ways to 'refine sensation', dematerialising the knowns into sensations as forms of 'spiritual' and 'radiant thinking', acknowledging art's essential primacy as a plane of composition. This is comparable to the artist's refrain that his paintings are '...not readable. I'm merely aware of their aesthetics.' Yunizar's allusion to writing may also be seen to be significant as attempts to forestall the conventional regard for painting as 'message'. The scribbling, or in particular, the marks produced – seen as gesture, technique and repetition – points towards the futility of reducing the painted form to words or descriptions that equate meanings, rather to be seen as sensations of becoming and flux, of endless possibilities.

Coretan explores the potentials of institutional-private partnerships in exhibition making. The NUS Museum and the NUS Centre For the Arts are happy to collaborate with Gajah Gallery in presenting the exhibition. We are also happy to have received essay contributions for this exhibition catalogue from Institut Teknologi Bandung academician, Mr Aminudin Siregar, Mr Enin Supriyanto and Ms Parveen Sandhu, providing the exhibition with a range of perspectives.