

YUNIZAR

Aminudin TH Siregar

Yunizar is a nightmare to fanatics of realism. He challenges all that is accurate and measurable in nature, all that resembles reality, images that are deliberately positioned on canvas, all that is rational and all art with political ends. Not surprisingly then, Yunizar is considered unique in the public domain of Indonesian art.

From a historical perspective, Yunizar is the most recent representative of a certain aesthetic 'sect' that has developed in Indonesia from the intermingling of two main movements of modern art.

Following neither the tradition of S. Sudjojono's realism nor the abstract tendencies of the Bandung school in the 1960s, Yunizar seeks the 'psychedelic' aesthetic credo that we encounter in the art of Oesman Effendi, Rusli, Nashar and to an extent Zaini, Mardian and Soedibio. These painters infuse spiritual aspects into their art: bringing the realms of the subconscious to the surface; projecting 'essential' forms as well as conveying elements of the artist's solitude and less than rational tendencies. Yet to be understood by art historians, these artists appear to stand outside mainstream art despite their teachers S. Sudjojono, Affandi and Hendra Gunawan – all of whom achieved prominence earlier.

These artists are outside history because their compositions are associated not with external but with internal realities. The 1945 revolution demanded that artists' address social reality and the formation of national art identity, thereby making internal realities difficult to accept. The result, as we know, is art depicting war, acting as sociological records of the time. Art-making outside this category is seen as art serving the artists' own intentions. Such art is labeled abstract art, and has a number of derivative variations.

Painters Oesman Effendi and Zaini, for example, belong to this latter school with its development of an abstract genre that is varied. These artists seemed to not want to be 'rationalized' by the revolution, nor to be forced to submit to certain ideologies. Their search for artistic identity was not, for example, the same as that of S. Sudjojono's. Neither were they complying with the universalism of Western art – apparent in the tendencies of the Bandung artists. There is no indication that they were striving to synthesize art from the East and the West, leaving Effendi to comment in the 1950s, that "*Issues of the West and East at a certain era is nothing but nonsense.*"



It cannot however be said that these artists never sought an Indonesian art identity. They were aware that within themselves there was ‘personality’ and ‘identity’, and both are different. These manifest as different faces that they could not disregard. It was with this realization that they created art.

“... young artists who have not produced large-scale paintings, but through watercolour paintings, pastel and ink works, have shown that they have begun a new page in Indonesian painting. Zaini, who is only 24 years old, has shown an understanding of lines and colours in painting. For Zaini, as well as for Oesman Effendi, Abstract influences are apparent. By experimenting with colors and lines they provided possibilities for growth of Indonesian painting in the coming days. Clarity and originality in both young painters became fundamental.” M. Balfas, 1951

The school of these painters is distinct from the pure analytical abstraction of the Bandung academy. Trisno Sumardjo, in 1954, criticizes the Bandung academy as a school that is “subservient to the Western laboratory”, and adds that, *“Only art which has gone through such a process will possess a certain freshness because it is pure, not contrived. Art that is processed within the walls of schools and laboratories alone, is not a natural process of growth, but one that is kunstmatig (artificial).”*

In conclusion, we see that at least three schools with differing aesthetic ideologies fill the history of artistic development in Indonesia. The first school with its realism – socialism is represented by S. Sudjojono; the second school by Oesman Effendi et al.; and the third school is represented by Bandung academic painters such as Ahmad Sadali et al. interestingly, these schools do not keep to themselves but interact to produce new variations which enrich the aesthetic vocabulary of Indonesian painting.

The school represented by Oesman Effendi is one that has not been discussed often. The conception of its artworks is still considered in its early

stages, and thus not deemed worthy of consideration yet. Nevertheless, the art from this school historically represents the gap between the dichotomy of the academic and the non-academic; between the representational and the non-representational. The paintings lie on the threshold of the realms of the subconscious. They continuously project 'psychological realities' and maximize intuition in art, a process of art-making considered an 'outsider' from mainstream art in the country.

Yunizar's historical position in Indonesia, is as an artist who follows the aesthetic formulae explored by the school of Oesman Effendi et al. These artists – in Trisno Sumardjo's words – have "*a certain freshness because the art is pure, not contrived*".

In recent years, Indonesian art has been so crowded with realist painting techniques that it has begun tending towards photographic realism. Yunizar however, has stayed on his own aesthetic path.

He has ignored the changes in aesthetic trends happening around him. Although his themes have changed, the nuances in his work remain the same: psychedelic, intuitive, naïve, raw, primitive, crude, intense, neurotic, childlike, spontaneous, marginal and completely uninstitutionalized – despite graduating from an art academy.

In Yunizar's art, many things become impossible – this is caused by the difficulty of finding patterns of representation. His paintings do not show synonymous forms, specific associations or perceptual lines that construct immediately recognizable codes, signs, metaphors or symbolic meaning. The forms in his paintings arise organically, occasionally corresponding with reality, but more often than not abandoning it. What is more significant is how Yunizar prioritizes and attends to what he calls "rasa", which in English could be best translated as the sum of *sense, feeling, taste, flavor, sensation* and more.

Yunizar's style is often associated with that of Cy Twombly, Jean Michel Basquiat and even Johann Knopf. The basic but imaginative forms that frequently feature in his works lead us to Laura Craig McNellis. Some pieces echo the



Silver Flower V, 2010

expression of mental conditions in the art of pioneer Art Brut artist, Jean Dubuffet. Yunizar's paintings easily prompt us to say "... *any child of eight could have done it*".

He extracts images for his paintings from his daily life. His work often projects strong impressions of his cultural background, and one of these is the "Minang house" - the metaphor of "kampung" (village) that is strongly related to the psychological state of ethnic immigrants from West Sumatra to Java, as experienced by Yunizar himself.



Yellow Flower I, 2010

can detect an 'anti' attitude towards making meaning. Such a relationship to reality and to the construction of meaning is reminiscent of the painter Nashar, of the Dadaist, nihilist, anti-conceptual, anti-theory, anti-aesthetic, anti-technique, anti-style, and anti-formalism. Yunizar's simplicity is exactly like that of Zaini's or Mardian's. For sociologist Arief Budiman, the two painters tend not to favor theory. Both of them often say "*Just draw.*" As does Yunizar.

Why such an 'anti' attitude? Art history often talks of artists with such a nihilistic attitude. There appears to be an extreme distrust towards art and life, a lack of confidence in an identity that could jeopardise their place in society and

It is difficult to lure Yunizar into a long discussion of his work. Rarely does he enter a structured discussion, but when this does occur, we get insights to his work. His keywords help make his art coherent and understandable. However, he also emphasizes that "rational" meaning present in his works are not as important as their "irrational" sides or faces. For Yunizar, "*Rasa is far more important than anything. I wish to present rasa in all my paintings.*"

Yunizar disagrees that "concept" is important in making art. "Natural instincts eventually bring us to concept, that is, if concept in art is absolutely necessary," says Yunizar.

Yunizar's art often engage us in situations that are 'fluctuating' - situations that makes us hesitate in assigning meaning to what we see. We are at times led to a particular meaning, and at others we are asked to keep away or to distrust the apparent meaning. We

their role as an individual in the nation. Is this a reflection of a split individuality? A manifestation of the presence or lack of an acknowledged identity which can characterize art in a 'Third World' country? This 'anti' side of Yunizar corresponds with the history of art in Indonesia especially with its earlier artists. Yunizar's artistic lineage links with those of Oesman Effendi et al. historically, resonating the same aesthetical spectrum and way of thought.

Jogja, where Yunizar began his career, has long been known as a city with a strong tradition of realism. In the 1980s, people spoke of 'surrealism a la Jogja'. Ivan Sagito and Lucia Hartini contributed towards the development of this aesthetic genre, widening the horizons of painting techniques and influencing, to an extent, the next generation of artists. It is not too far-fetched to say that Jogja artists are competent in both technique and social themes. Academician Fadjat Sidik has long been known as an artist with commitment and consistency in his development of abstraction. Jogja can also count the painter Handrio as its own. On another stratum are artists known for their tendency towards decorative-ornamental patterns.

Until the early 1990s, there were four genres of art practice in Jogja - realism, surrealism, abstraction, and decorativism. Then a new generation of art arose; one that uses art as an instrument for liberating the individual and as a practice which also promotes democratization efforts in the midst of the New Order regime. Subversive towards prevailing sociopolitical values, these artists have paved the way for the pluralization of art, resulting in new art forms such as installation, performance art, interactive art, and environmental art, as well as an aesthetic blend of local cultures and modern languages.

Until the end of the millennium, Jogja was a haven for experimentation, an arena open to anyone wanting to conduct artistic exploration. Recently, many artworks with renewal qualities have been created. They appeal to the public and are of excellent quality. The new generation artists bringing about this renewal is Heri Dono, Nindityo, Eddie Hara, Agung Kurniawan, Hanura Hosea, the Apotik Komik group, the Jendela group and many more. On the next stratum are Ugo Untoro, S. Teddy.D along and others. They are shaping the evolution of contemporary art in Jogja, and in Indonesia. Their works comment on situations affecting society and politics, as well as uncover

the darker sides of culture and contemporary life. This artistic movement is increasing in popularity, particularly prior to and since the Reformation in 1998.

Yunizar and the Jendela group sit outside this movement. They distance themselves from tumultuous socio-political events, choosing instead to develop and sharpen their visual interests and approaches amongst themselves, expanding their aesthetics through harnessing the media. Their works express personal views on the everyday. They delve into areas that are by-passed by clamorous art focused on socio-political issues.

Within the Jendela group, Yunizar may be the only one still devoted to creating paintings. Where other members have diverged in other media, Yunizar continues to go with his heart. He is not an artist who follows trends. Nor does he wander into passive nihilism as a collective.

Jogja Psychedelia presents Yunizar's latest series of flower paintings, all painted since his previous show entitled 'Coretan' in Singapore. The image of the flower frequently appears in Yunizar's paintings, usually in smaller forms and not as a main focus. Also featured are trees and bushes.

In *Jogja Psychedelia*, Yunizar gives flowers his unique treatment; they are enlarged to become the centre

of focus, and stand out through contrast created by color juxtaposition. Yunizar combines the color silver with other colors, thereby lending a sensation of technogadget by alluding to the colors of sophisticated technological products. Conversely, the use of muted colors brings primitive nuances particularly when used to paint seemingly simple compositions. His use of silver signifies glamour, modernity, elegance and grace. It contrasts sharply with the impression of 'primitiveness', naiveté and childlikeness - in the way he processes color.

Casting aside all expectations of material and media based on Yunizar's earlier works, the current exhibition also includes an installation made up of thousands of resin casts of bees and their nests. This is a surprising move in his career as an artist.

Yunizar locks in the movement of the flowers with an irregular circular shape, adding patterns to its edges. When seen from certain perspectives, his paintings give the impression of tablecloths with flower motifs, rather than just flowers in still-life painting traditions. From this perspective, the flatness of Yunizar's painting is even more apparent. If we disregard the aforementioned pattern, 'the depth of the form' can be felt.

Flowers have often become the trademark of artists. We remember Vincent Van Gogh through his sunflowers or poppy fields, and Georgia O'Keefe for his sensual flower paintings. In Indonesia, Oesman Effendi, Nashar, Trisno Sumardjo and S. Sudjojono paint flowers.

Like houses and human figures, flowers are often painted by people of all ages and circles. Little children paint flowers too. One could question why we are so familiar and fond of drawing flowers, houses and human figures. What is the link between these three objects that they often appear in art all over the world? What is behind the instinct that drives us to draw them?

S. Sudjojono extensively drew flowers to reflect a particular atmosphere and to frame our awareness of ordinary objects that are often ignored in our day-to-day lives. For Oesman Effendi and Nashar, flowers are strong depictions of a move to create something that cannot escape the 'inner world', that is defeated by social realities as the truth. It is not the desire of an artist to process the formalities of color, shape or lines that typically end as an abstraction of the shape of a flower. This is the case with Yunizar. The meaning of a flower in his paintings belongs to the ranks of Oesman Effendi or Nashar.

The difference clearly lies in the context of the eras in which all belong to. A difference which results in the different 'rasa' we detect when standing in front of the paintings of Oesman Effendi, Nashar and Yunizar. With Oesman and Nashar, we experience 'selera masa lalu' (taste of the old times). With Yunizar, we have 'selera masa kini' (taste of the current). Sensing and feeling this rasa, we experience the historical transformation of aesthetics.

As stated above, in Indonesian art history, Yunizar's position within the lineage has been outlined by Oesman Effendi, et al. Hence, the context of his work can be 'read', rather than interpreted using a prevailing mode of interpretation.

Affirming Yunizar's position in Indonesia's history of art is as important as the process of reading the meanings behind his paintings. Perhaps this affirmation is what we should pursue.

i

The most popular statement from this genre of art is "Advocacy Art". It is a process of art that bridges the gulf between art by opening up to direct participation by a number of people, while the artist himself lives and works in a community who lives in the outposts. One of the pioneers of this genre of art is Moelyono.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arief Budiman, *Kebebasan, Negara, Pembangunan: Kumpulan Tulisan 1965-2005, 2006* (Jakarta: Pustaka Alvabet dan Freedom Institute), 394.

M. Balfas, *Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru*, *Majalah Kebudayaan INDONESIA*, No. 4 Year II April 1951, 2 – 6.

Trisno Sumardjo, *Bandung Mengabdikan Laboratorium Barat*, *Mingguan Siasat*, 5 December 1954.