

CELEBRATION OF COMPASSION





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Actualizing Humanity

Benedicto Audi Jericho

"If one's feelings of humanity are offended, everyone with feeling will also be offended, except for people who are mad and those with truly criminal mentalities, even though they may be university graduates."

-Pramoedya Ananta Toer -

This piece of phrase from the novel Child of All Nations by Pram revives our conscience. Entering the era of post-truth marked by the widespread of disrupted information, maintaining sanity and humanity is a substantial thing to hold on to. Humanitarian issues are an everyday problem. Such events involve our selves, our families, and communities throughout the world.

Humanitarian issues are a common issue, closely related to human rights. The issue of war and refugees, environmental or ecological problems, inter-human conflict, inter-community conflict, economic and social injustice, discrimination on minority groups and marginal people are part of our reality.

In the Indonesian context, the differences in choices which seemed fine on the beginning started to heat up and become increasingly tense prior to the celebration of democracy a few moments ago. We begin to segregate in groups. Friends are throwing issues in the communication group channel. One and another spread news, photos and videos which they believed to be the most genuine. To verify the truth, we often confirm with "no picture = hoax". Yet lately what happened is probably "the picture might be a hoax". Our beliefs could be shaken, or we could even become a fanatic.

The disputes of the dissent defect the friendship, the brotherhood, and the sympathy. We no longer care about

the place, the time, or the person we are facing. What are we really fighting for if we have to hurt others' feelings?

After this political turmoil recedes, let's take a look to our conscience. Maybe we need to take a distant and reflect on the actualized portrait of humanity. This is a good time to celebrate our humanity which has long been eroded by resentment.

In this momentum, Srisasanti Syndicate is about to mark it by having an exhibition along with the release of a book entitled *Celebration of Compassion*. Twenty three artists from various places and backgrounds participated in this program, presenting their artworks with narratives that are closely related to humanity. In addition to the main program, Kohesi Initiatives and Nasi Goreng Diplomacy (two junior galleries from Srisasanti Foundation group) also presented two young artists in a special presentation project.

We believe that art is a medium that is able to provide space for expression and opinion. Medium which is always able to channel one of the human rights. Given its history, in times when a society is experiencing pressure and violations of human rights, there will emerge artworks that are in favor of humanity. In this moment, we hope that the artworks displayed will enable reflective & contemplative power for the audience. We believe that art is able to stimulate our imagination, it creates awe by playing around with the unpredictability around us.

New Space and Renewal of Direction

Over the past few years under the name of Srisasanti, we continue to try exploring the extent of art and reflect it on numbers of occasions that have taken place. The practice of art has entered a new phase. The mode of artwork creation does not longer stay inside the studio; a collaborative, a participatory and research have become part of the artwork creation. A new level of appreciation also emerged. Art appreciators no longer dwell on the circle of creators, curators, and collectors. Along with the expansion of the presentation possibilities, visual art is enjoyed by all people regardless of their age –across any occupations and geographical boundaries. The art market is not a sole catalyst for the emergence of new works.

Within the dynamics of visual art which entered this new phase, we are trying to be back again with various speculations and alternative answers. In the midst of the glorious Yogyakarta art scene with the emergence of young artists, and the passion for DIY & DIWO (do it yourself and do it with others), the presence of new spaces is what is needed by them to present their creative works.

As a response, Srisasanti Foundation is present with an alternative space namely Tirtodipuran Link. Located at the heart of Yogyakarta's art scene, Tirtodipuran Link is built to grow and to facilitate a state of multi-possibility for art practices supported by various facilities such as exhibition space, residency room, discussion room, and café. In the

future, Tirtodipuran Link will be professionally managed by Srisasanti Foundation's group of galleries (Srisasanti Syndicate, Kohesi Initiatives, and Nasi Goreng Diplomacy) to provide opportunities for all circles to be able to experience a constructive contestation.

Tirtodipuran Link is expected to be able to become an arena for meetings and dialogue, also as a hub between ideas, artworks, and their appreciators. In short, Tirtodipuran Link wants to be a link and connector. With the development of the network and the emergence of new networks, we hope that this constellation of networks can be a valuable capital accumulation for artists.

As it is closely related to the art market, the actor behind Tirtodipuran Link also transforms to be a facilitator for the young emerging artists. At least there are three actual aspects that will always be elaborated such as technical quality, discourse strategy, and mental preparation.

In relation to public education, Tirtodipuran Link wants to bring together the works of established artists from Indonesia and abroad with the public of Yogyakarta. Thus the art learning process is not limited within the scope of formal educational institutions only, but also directly within the art scene.

We look forward to welcoming you at Tirtodipuran Link, Yogyakarta.

Celebration of Compassion

Notes by Suwarno Wisetrotomo

As the era shifts in such a vast motion, every little thing within is following the changes as well. Industrial Revolution 4.0. will quickly turn become 5.0, 6.0, and so on –with such an unexpected output which will transform every aspect of life. Research and mega data underlie every taken step. Every step should be well-planned, and the space of speculation is then tightened down. Communication is now becoming easier and faster, cutting through space and time with no detention. The world is in our hands.

Nowadays, everyone seems occupied; as if they do not have much time to meet other people face-to-face—even with the closest ones: the family. Often we witness the moment when

people were in the same place, close to each other, yet they are not connected to each other. They do not see each other's face, they do not speak to each other—they do not understand each other. People are now spending more of their time on their gadget as if all those visual and digital things are becoming their reality. The simplicity of using the gadget, either consciously or unconsciously, bringing out numerous pitfalls such as misunderstanding in communication. Producing words, sentences, developing an understanding without even performing a verification, nor even cross-checking. Meaning, perception, or whatsoever, has become out of control. It has also become less reliable due to its lack of references. Along with it is the inevitable digital imprint which now could also play as a trap, even it is reliable enough to become a legal proof in law. Digital imprint can also be used to deceive and to produce false information, vilification and incitement.

And so is time. Everyone has their own timepiece –such a reminder to us, yet often building up a sense of running-out-of-time. Time available to contemplate, to build up space and the hustle bustle of our daily life is evicting aesthetic behavior. Thus, the most basic yet important thing of having an interaction with each other is lost. *Habluminallah* (the relationship between human and God) and *habluminannas* (the relationship between human and each other, also with the other creatures) that should guide the balance of life are often positioned in the extreme sides –creating such disharmony.

The technology of information has changed almost all of the aspect of life, in the scale of an individual social/communal, nation, economic, politics, security, even nationwide. It is an impact of disruption. Disruption, as stated by Rhenald Kasali, is an innovation that will replace the whole system with the new ones.¹ As for M. Christensen, disruption is destructive yet creative²; moving along between 'destroying' and 'creating something new'.³ At the moment, we are trapped by the grand wave of information which comes in various forms and qualities (either destructive or creative); whether it is a fact, made-up stories, a lie, a gossip, pointless news –they keep striking their waves toward human regardless the age.

Now we are going to apply the term mentioned by F. Budi Hardiman, to become '*homo digitalis*'. Hardiman stated, "Human is only a component of a system of the communication media. They are the medium of communication within the network of the anonymity of digital communication. Human is the messenger".⁴ Among such reality, kinship, sensitivity, and compassion between each individual, and toward nature itself, has become a serious matter.

At the individual level, are we really all occupied? How long have you, all of us, been immersed in the falsehood, lies, betrayal, ambition, promotion of discrimination (of ethnicity, religion, race), or also in other destructive practices? Or are we occupied in a meaningless and pointless conversation that dry out our intelligence, our sensitivity, and humanity, and on

the contrary, thus shapes ourselves to be banal, intolerant, and full of destructive heat? Don't we feel like an estranged alien? Seems like all of us immersed (and drowning) in the great waves that hit the world, plunging everyone into a destructive and a useless life? Of course, there are exceptions, for those who are able to be critical and to get out from the trap of such waves. They will be the light that is useful for others. The risk of such great shock and pretentious behavior is the crisis in humanity.

The urgent question is, where and how the artists take part so that their works could be useful for many people? This question does not depart from the presumption in which artworks are capable of changing the circumstance (social, political, economic, and religious). Not at all! The question rests on the very basic hope that artwork could have the potential to touch the 'awareness' of the audience. The awareness toward their surrounding which is layered with problems, uncertainties, turbulence (social, political, economic), etc., then could lead to the ability to take a more positive role and the position, for the sake of themselves and for others as well.

The reality around us, even in religious matters, shows that some would act brutally aggressive; citing from Fathurahman who stated that, "Our religious practice is drying up".⁵ Specifically I would like to guess that perhaps 'our art practice is also drying up.' I mean the work practice in art (especially work practice in visual art) no longer gives their voice to the

issues of humanity or life, as it is now presents only trivial matters with such a minimalist artistic touch. Thus, the artworks that unable to chronicle the situation and the movement of times start to emerge, and so then they are alienated among the society.

An artwork, just like literature and other works of art, 'should be able to unite the differences and enable them to feel and to greet each other' as quoted again from Fathurahman, so that we could also 'sharpen our sense and spirituality, so the beauty in the religion won't become a rare thing; for the public space within the social media to be not not tightly packed with verbal abuse, ferocious words, and accusation of others as an infidel; for the moderation of religions to work as a balancing pendulum; so then people won't acknowledge natural disaster as a form of God's anger'.⁶

Visual art (as well as other form of artworks) that able to evoke its audience's awareness departs from a strong yet evocative idea and issue. Strong ideas and issues will encourage the emergence of artworks in various forms, structures, as metaphors that can be effectively included with a strong message. Speaking of effectiveness, it does not mean by proposing an absolute truth, but instead, it invites various meanings with a number of enlightening arguments. With strong arguments and distinguished perspectives, it will open such an inviting space for a debate that also promotes enlightenment for all.

Artworks at present, as we all know, are in the complexity of such challenges particularly on how to deal with the drying manner of expression, which in an ideal state should have been able to touch the realm of human sensitivity. When sensitivity begins to blunt, what will happen is that the mind, speech, and behavior become disoriented –thus will become banal as well. This kind of situation is a global phenomenon, it occurs to everyone along with the rapid development of technology of information. This development always brings out paradoxical and ironic facts; one side will step forward, another side will step back; one side will be simplified, another side will be complicated; getting closer toward one side, another side will getting away; etc. Frictions will undeniably continue to occur between the plus and the minus. Now is the time for visual art to find their momentum by playing their role in evoking sensitivity and awareness.

Art Crisis, Cultural Crisis

Departing from the explanation above, we can ask an immediate question; is there any artwork that delivers enlightenment and evokes awareness willingly? Is there any artwork that is 'involved' (with social, economic, politics, and cultural issues)? Is there any artwork that depicts the power as a chronicle of social, politic, economic and cultural event at a point of time? Is there any contemporary artwork which, borrowing the words of Plekhanov more than 60 years ago, not only producing life but rather explaining it, since "The artworks are often 'intends to evaluate the symptoms of life'".⁷ This important question is raised as a trigger to recall

the achievements (artworks) of the artists that have ever existed, and are always discussed because of their meaning and their context.

As examples, one of which was the sketch work of Srihadi Soedarsono (born; in Solo, December 4th, 1931) that records the crash of Dakota VT-CLA in Ngoto Village, Karangjati, Bantul regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta after being shot down by two P40 Kitty Hawk hunters in Maguwoharjo, Yogyakarta. The plane originally flew from India, through Bangkok, Malaysia, and Singapore to transport donated medicines from those visited countries for the Indonesian Red Cross (PMI).⁸ This artwork is equivalent to an eyewitness testimony, for the young man was covering such incident immediately. Such is somehow inconceivable, how in the midst of a complicated and risky situation, Srihadi recorded this event.

However, we will soon understand because Srihadi was once involved in armed battle, aside from being a journalist and painter as well. As the encouragement of nationalism multiplied his guts, Srihadi then did such a risky attempt.⁹ Srihadi's sketches and paintings which contain social commentary are part of the remaining important artifacts for us to understand a piece of the nation's journey.

The next example of work is "Maka Lahirlah Angkatan '66" (1966) by S. Sudjojono (1914-1986): a young man with such a tense facial expression, straight-forward stare, wearing a

white blouse, bind in a red jacket, with a yellow hat, dark trousers, the right side of the trousers rolled in half, the left hand holding the paint can, the right hand holding the brush. In the background is the traffic passing by in the city of Jakarta, which seemed chaotic, with the visual of walls that were full of graffiti protests. Just like any other Sudjojono's paintings, in the lower right corner there is an inscription reads, "With all the tools, with all the amazing guts, these young messengers are shouting out: for the sake of Ampera!" The word 'Ampera' means 'the mandate of people's suffering. During the 1960s it was such a mantra to uphold in the revolutionary battle for people's welfare. Every speech and political action, is nothing but the mandate of the suffering of the people, in order to realize a prosperous society like what is imagined during the times of the Independence Day. Sudjojono's painting is truly an artifact that holds mental facts, social facts, and political facts of the era (1966).

History records that the era of 1966 gave birth to idealistic and militant young people who were striking their will in form of creation, criticism and protest as means of animating the independence as idealized and imagined by them. Youth organizations such as KAPPI (Indonesian Youth and Student Act Unit), KAMI (Indonesian Student Act Unit), KABI (Indonesian Labor Action Unit), KAWI (Indonesian Women's Act Unit), and KASI (Indonesian Scholars Unity Act) continued to carry out demonstrations in demand of the disorganization of PKI (Indonesian Communist Party).¹⁰ Such actions led to the fall of the Old Order, and the rise of the New Order. The 98.5 x

84 cm painting has a layered width of meaning, among others since it witnessed the history of socio-political change that determines the direction of how a nation finally "become Indonesia" in this day and age, along with all the issues happening within.

Furthermore, we should not overlook how Edhi Sunarso (1932-2015) embodied the will of Bung Karno to establish monuments as a symbol of Indonesia as a civilized country. Up to this point we can still witness these historical pieces created by Edhi Sunarso; Selamat Datang Monument (1962), Aerospace Monument (1962), West Irian Liberation Monument (1963), and other works by him as references to understand Indonesian history. These works are more than just monuments, they are the symbol of a newly independent nation, and the people's desire to show the world that Indonesia exists, as a country that cares and takes sides with humanity.

The works record monumental events and become an evocative historical artifact. Also there was an era with a number of paintings, which can be used to uncover the historical events of the nation's journey. The events of Indonesian history should be read, written, and created into new artworks as reminding artifacts, to chronicle social facts, mental facts, and factual events.

Is there any artwork that records various events in the Indonesian contemporary era? If art and its practice deny

human problems and humanity, what immediately emerges is the art crisis. Denial is characterized by banal attitudes; blindly dedicates the self on economic, power, and political interests –within situations beyond the limit. In other words, artwork which created under 'on behalf' matter is nothing but practical interest. The position and the situation indicates that artists are co-opted by 'interests' (power, bureaucracy, economy, politics, and as such). The end of art crisis is a cultural crisis because artworks do not longer belong in the realm of cultural learning and work. The artworks composed in the frame of pragmatic interests hardly give any meaning in life experience and life itself.

In order to get out of such chaos, I quoted Donald B. Calne who implied that "Art and religion are inseparable, the biological role of art is the same as the biological role of religion –strengthening cultural ties. The role is still the same today, although it may have developed its own life that is separate from religion, art is still a unifying force for culture and sub-culture."¹¹

Fine art is now in a serious realm and facing a serious challenge. Its function for human, humanity and the universe is being questioned. Artwork that acts as mere entertainment or *klangenan* is hard to imagine having the power to appeal to human values.

How Humanity is Celebrated

Humanity should be celebrated. Only by relying on

consciousness as a human being who carries out duties as "God's representative on earth" (*kalifatullah*), all issues of life and the life itself should be resolved properly. As "representative of God", you must hold the principles of honesty, fairness, tolerance, and mutual respect. Such awareness also grows because of the belief that art should be stand in with cross-faith stance. An artwork carries a function to voice out those values with various ways, approaches, and choices. Principally, the creation of artwork rests on an awareness of diversity (pluralism), awareness of differences, and therefore the awareness of the absence of a single meaning leads to the awareness of the importance of tolerance.

An artwork which often 'hid' the true meaning through various forms and metaphors is an effort to create ambiguity and potentially creating various awareness (diversity and tolerance) for the audience. With these signs, the interpretation becomes very open. Since it is based on a basic principle that there is no absolute meaning of art and there is no single interpretation, hence it is compelled to create respect for each perception as long as it is backed by reliable arguments. Everyone with different experiences and references can make free interpretations. That is how good work has always been; able to trigger the practice of democracy, namely the attitude of respecting differences.

Here are some examples of the work of artists to begin discussing how humanity is celebrated. The works of Entang

Wiharso, his ideas have always been triggered by a number of issues that potentially causing tension, misunderstanding, arbitrariness for various reasons. He is encouraged to address the disparity of the problems within human relationships. Entang aims at aspects of stress, conflict, misunderstanding, and threats to become energy in his works. Therefore, watching his works means watching a striking dramaturgy, a noisy configuration of strange figures with attributes of various forms of weapons, with a touch of ornamentation here and there. The choice of material and the aluminum cutting technique supports these dramatic ideas. Entang Wiharso's artwork is a recording of the inner situation of contemporary social life which stomps the consciousness.

Not all problems of life are seen and addressed with a frown, but also with irony that contains humor. That is what is often enacted by Heri Dono in both two and three-dimensional works. It presents the irony of society, politic and cultural, and puts itself in the matter from the edges, from the periphery, to see unexpected aspects and make fun of them. That is why his works strongly present forms and atmosphere of caricature. Maybe for Heri Dono, life after all is nothing but caricatures.

Human values are indeed universal values which are held by artists from time to time, in which they could also absorb the experience of past figures or events. The artist Galam Zulkifli, for example, records those values while backed with high skills in his presenting techniques. Figures like Affandi, Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, and S. Sudjojono

summarized in the "Illumination Series" are presented in such technique which results in a compelling visual sensation. The paintings keep layers of shapes (scenes) that can be seen alternately, by changing the lights (lighting). A very successful visual strategy, for it gives a sensation of form-shapes shifting on a single piece of painting.

Another example is the works of Eddie Hara, who has lived in Basel for the last 22 years. His works reflect the freedom to look at and understand world problems, urban life with all its tensions, including subcultural problems. He is in direct contact with the great wave which shifts the life itself. For Eddie Hara, such reality is a field of stimulating inspiration, which enriches forms, figures that boisterously interact with each other in his drawing. The problems keep alternating, disappearing, and continually shifting, but life must go on. We do not have to frown a lot.

Undeniably, technical skills in various methods and approaches are indeed the main trigger to for us be able to penetrate through the message and the meaning which the artist wants to convey. Franziska Fennert shows a compilation of such visual narrative through her collage works; by sticking, sewing, drawing, and shaping various materials. Her work encourages the audience to observe closely, how the figure is formed (by her combination of various techniques). Watching this kind of work raises the urge to produce narratives based on their personal experiences. Those who seem to be interacting, talking, or doing activities provide a gesture and

mental suggestion for the audience. With that being said, the celebration of humanity is now realized.

It is a whole different experience when we deal with the works of Ivan Sagita, as his creation trigger a contemplating feel; contemplating life in certain limits which actually absurd. The female figures with a cloth wrapping her body, with a tree growing on her body, with hair continually growing as if it is against the fate of death; it is truly a visual experience that touches the most elemental spiritual state. Ivan Sagita is hugely concerned about human and humanity problems. Ivan Sagita also researches many cases: the function of cloth, scarves, wells, cattle, hair, and suicides in Gunung Kidul; a phenomenon called *Pulung Gantung*. His observation becomes such a great influence for his compositions of works. Humanity basically deals with our quality and our action of empathy towards others and the universe.

The works mentioned above are just examples, as well as an effort to answer the question of how do artists perform the celebration of compassion. It is more than just a discussion on notes, recordings, and composition with various visual symptoms; the urgency lies in the in-depth study related to the theme "human and humanity" in today's artworks.

Tirtodipuran Link

A new space is now present in Yogyakarta: Tirtodipuran Link, located on Tirtodipuran Street, number 50. The name implies the passion and ambition: *link* (to link) which accompanies

Tirtodipuran (the location), is an invitation to 'relate'; to connect, to establish a communication and to form a network. Even though it is not in the center of the city, it is still an area that is very accessible to reach from any point.

Tirtodipuran Link is not just a space for exhibition as it is expected to also be an arena for meetings, conversations, contestation rooms, and as a mean to expand networks. Facilities such as seminar room, residency room and café are available for creative people to present their work. This arena is also home to various creative institutions such as the Srisasanti Foundation, Srisasanti Syndicate, Kohesi Initiatives, and Nasi Goreng Diplomacy. Tirtodipuran Link desires to be the starting point and meeting point of the Southeast Asian creative network, for then emerging further to the international network.

Marking the presence of Tirtodipuran Link, this exhibition entitled The Celebration of Compassion is proudly presented to the public. As stated in the editorial, this exhibition is intended as a celebration of humanity values which is now endangered. If politics is unstable, the social order is harmed, intolerance spreads around, nature is exploited, the environment is damaged, the artists and the art itself must immediately take its role to touch the deepest side of the mankind –its human nature. Of being said, artists and their artworks should then contribute to education and establish the awareness of humanity and universal problems.

Notes:

¹Rhenald Kasali, *Disruption*, Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2017 (Sixth Edition), p. 34

²Rhenald Kasali, *Ibid*, p. 35.

³Suwarno Wisetrotomo, *Meniti Ombak di Era Milenial (Problem di Sekitar Fungsi Seni, dan Kritik Kebudayaan)*, A Speech on Dies Natalis XXXIV, Indonesia Art Institution Yogyakarta, Wednesday, 30 May 2018, p. 4

⁴F Budi Hardiman, "Homo Digitalis", *Kompas*, Thursday, March 1st 2018, p. 6

⁵Oman Fathurahman, "Bangsa Ini Perlu Rasa", *Kompas*, Wednesday, January 2nd 2019.

⁶Oman Fathurahman, *Kompas*, *Ibid*.

⁷G. Plekhanov, *Seni dan Kehidupan Sosial (Unaddressed Letters – Art and Social Life)*, Translator: Samanjaya, Bandung: Ultimius, 2006, p. 2

⁸*Srihadi dan Paradigma Seni Rupa Indonesia*, a book published on behalf the celebration of Indonesian Independence Day 54th and sketch show of Srihadi Soedarsono works, (Curator: Jim Supangkat), Jakarta: Galeri Lontar, Komunitas Utan Kayu, August 27th –September 27th 1999).

⁹Taufik Abdullah elaboration on "Indonesia, 1946-1949", and Asikin Hasan, "Srihadi di Tengah Perjuangan Kemerdekaan" (Asikin Hasan's interview with Srihadi), in *Srihadi dan Paradigma Seni Rupa Indonesia*, *Ibid*.

¹⁰A short essay of Agus Dermawan T, "Maka Lahirlah Angkatan '66", in *Seabad S. Sudjojono, 1913-2013*, Jakarta: S. Sudjojono Center, Galeri Canna, 2013.

¹¹Donald B. Calne, *Batas Nalar, Rasionalitas & Perilaku Manusia (Within Reason, Rationality and Human Behavior)*, Translator: Parakriti T. Simbolon, Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2004, p. 299.