

POST BALI

It has almost been a decade whereby Mahendra Yasa has developed his practice of painting practice within a sense of awareness that contemporary painting is a form of thought, or concept that arises through personal issues within the notion of painting within art history itself. With this in mind, Mahendra Yasa attempts to avoid the burden of investigating the image of "traditional Balinese Painting" itself, whether technically nor conceptually.

He instead chooses to conduct his practice by utilizing realist painting techniques, as well as heavily utilizing appropriations in his paintings that have been globally recognized as modern or contemporary masterpieces.

A number of his solo shows since 2007 (Hendra Membaca Pollock, Emitan Fine Art Gallery, Surabaya) to his last in 2011 (Painting for Painting's Sake, Primo Marella Gallery, Milan) all express a unified spirit of investigations and explorations. For more than 5 years, he has recreated Pollock's dripping techniques; followed Robert Ryman's steps in the analysis of colors and paint pigments (White Series: Allegory of Painting, Richard Koh Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia); re-constructing famous works by De Kooning (Hendra's Woman: Reframing De Kooning, SIGlarts, Jakarta, 2009), as well as exhibiting self portraits in questioning features of visual mediums and specific painting techniques (As the Face No Longer Bespeaks the Soul, SIGlarts, Jakarta, 2010).

It was after these exhibitions where a discussion between Enin Supriyanto (POST BALI Curator) and Mahendra Yasa resulted in preliminary questions regarding the notion of "Balinese Painting". These discussions raised several key issues. For instance, while engaging himself completely within the concepts of western painting developments, why has Mahendra not shown an interest in "Balinese Paintings"? Within Indonesia's rich history of painting, is Bali not known for having a strong tradition of painting, even prior to the existence of Indonesian Modern Painting? How do we recognize – what and why – a painting that we may state as or accept as a "Balinese painting"?

There seems to exist a manifold series of complexities that have arisen within the canon of "Balinese Painting from period to period. These issues quickly stood in front of Mahendra Yasa as he prepared the works shown in this exhibition. The complexity of issues within the history of Balinese painting can no longer be faced by Mahendra Yasa through rudimentary approaches akin to breaking down and appropriating Pollock, Ryman or De Kooning. Mahendra Yasa has thus invited his peers, both artists as well as intellectuals, to join his project to investigate and experiment regarding "Balinese Painting" as subject matter, and for now he has coined the phrase Neo Pita Maha to describe this movement.

In his trials, Mahendra attempts to play and test the limits of where "Balinese" references may be inserted into contemporary art mediums and concepts. POST BALI is an inception point towards a larger, more complex project by Gede Mahendra Yasa.

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Sudah hampir satu dekade Mahendra Yasa menjalankan praktik melukis dengan gagasan bahwa lukisan kontemporer adalah sebetulnya pemikiran, atau konsep, yang berkubung dengan persoalan-persoalan di dalam dirinya sendiri, dalam perjalanan sejarah praktik seni lukis itu sendiri. Dengan pemikiran ini, Mahendra Yasa menghindarkan diri dari beban citra “seni lukis Bali” yang “tradisional”, baik secara teknis maupun isi. Ia memilih praktik yang mengandalkan teknik melukis realis dan pendekatan apropriasi terhadap karya-karya seni lukis yang sudah dikenal sebagai adiknya seni lukis modern atau kontemporer dunia.

Karya-karya Mahendra dalam sejumlah pameran tunggalnya sejak tahun 2007 (Hendra Membaca Pollock, Emitan Fine Art Gallery, Surabaya) hingga yang terakhir, 2011 (Painting for Painting’s Sake, Primo Marella Gallery, Milan) kesemuanya menampilkan semangat investigasi dan eksplorasi tadi. Selama lima tahun lebih ia telah mereka-ulang tetesan buratan cat Pollock; mengikuti jejak Robert Ryman untuk memeriksa warna dan pigmen cat (White Series: Allegory of Painting, Richard Koh Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia); membongkar-ulang karya terkenal Willem de Kooning (Hendra’s Woman: Reframing De Kooning, SIGlarts, Jakarta, 2009) menampilkan potret diri sambil mempertanyakan ciri-ciri visual bahan dan teknik melukis tertentu (As the Face No Longer Bespeaks the Soul, SIGlarts, Jakarta, 2010).

Seusai pameran inilah, dalam berbagai kesempatan pertemuan dan ngobrol, Mahendra Yasa dan Enin Supriyanto (kurator POST BALI) sampai pada beberapa pertanyaan awal tentang “seni lukis Bali”. Melalui percakapan inilah sejumlah soal yang menarik mulai muncul, misalnya: setelah sekian lama menyibukkan diri dengan berbagai konsep dalam sejarah perkembangan seni lukis Barat, apakah Mahendra tidak berminat memeriksa “seni lukis Bali”? Bukankah, dalam konteks sejarah seni lukis di Indonesia, Bali-lah sesungguhnya yang selama ini dianggap sudah punya tradisi “melukis”, bahkan sebelum seni lukis Indonesia modern ada? Bagaimana mengenali—apa dan mengapa—suatu lukisan dapat kita sebut atau terima sebagai “lukisan Bali”?

Inilah situasi yang harus segera dihadapi oleh Mahendra Yasa saat ia mempersiapkan karya-karyanya yang hadir dalam pameran kali ini. Kompleksitas persoalan sejarah seni lukis Bali akhirnya tidak bisa lagi dihadapi Mahendra Yasa hanya dengan pendekatan sederhana seperti ketika ia membongkar dan mengolah-ulang Pollock, Ryman atau de Kooning. Karena itulah, sambil mengerjakan karya-karya untuk pameran ini, ia mulai mengajak sejumlah rekan seniman dan intelektual muda di Bali untuk bersama-sama melakukan proyek investigasi dan eksperimen-tasi seni rupa dengan subyek utama: “seni lukis Bali”. Untuk sementara, menurut Mahendra Yasa, nama kelompok yang ‘belum resmi’ ini: Neo Pita Maha.

Dan dengan bekal itu, ia mencoba bermain-main dengannya, untuk menguji sampai mana yang “Bali” itu bisa bergaul dengan bahan-bahan dan gagasan seni rupa kontemporer. POST BALI merupakan awal dari dari suatu proyek yang lebih besar dan kompleks dari Gede Mahendra Yasa.

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