

*what we have here perceived as truth
we shall some day encounter as beauty*

press release

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a solo show by FX Harsono
curated by Hendro Wiyanto

LOKASI

Jogja National Museum (2nd floor)
Jl. Prof. Ki Amri Yahya 1
Yogyakarta

OPENING CEREMONY

Monday, July 1, 7.30 PM

EXHIBITION DURATION

1 – 22 July 2013
Open daily
(10.00 AM – 09.00 PM)

SIDE EVENTS

High tea and guided tour by Hendro Wiyanto
Saturday, July 6, 4.30 PM

Guided tour by Grace Samboh
Friday, July 12, 4.30 PM

Artist talk and guided tour by FX Harsono
Saturday, July 20, 4.30 PM

Free and open for public. RSVP to Ms. Mara at
poke@hyphen.web.id +6289671801546

**) A reversal of Schiller's statement (1788-1805),
"What we have here perceived as beauty we shall some day encounter as truth."*

Oppression does not end as the national flag is hoisted. The world remembers this statement as the words of a leader of a colonized nation. Historical narratives do not end when people perceive the story as having reached its conclusion. Similarly, the meaning of the past does not disappear from people's consciousness when the new era comes, a historian once said.

In the past, many Indonesian artists had strong "political awareness", and this is still true to this day. Such awareness brings them to the understanding that it is mostly the political elites who have determined or dominated the most important parts of the nation's historical yarn. In their hands, history becomes politics; it becomes "political history". Such history seems to have been rendered as the final version after being masterminded *at the tip of the pen, ensnared at gun point, or swept away at the edge of the fountain of history*. Such poetic phrases about the operations of the hegemonic power of history radiate from the glowing text in red light that FX Harsono (Blitar, East Java, Indonesia, 1949) wrote for one of his works in this exhibition.

Harsono is an artist who is interested in how grand discourses are written. To him, the opportunity to "sow" "other" narratives of history became more open after 1998, the year that marked the sea-change in the social and political conditions of Indonesia, after the demise of Soeharto as Indonesia's number one man, on Thursday, May 21, 1998. An Indonesian intellectual said at that moment of transition: "Good bye the old government, welcome the new one." For Harsono that moment of change also marked the advent of a "spring time of creations" of his own.

Art observers in Indonesia today understand that one of the more significant contexts that serve as the creative basis for FX Harsono after 1998 has been his solemn attention to the small stories outside the "national history" that is perceived as the true and grand history. Such stories find their roots in the biographical narrative, the "original" name, the origin and personal narratives of his family, as well as his personal experience as a Chinese descendant living in the Indonesian society.

An album that his father left behind has unexpectedly become an all-important document about the victims; Chinese community living in his town of birth, who had been robbed and murdered during the time of the *politionele acties* (the Dutch "military actions") in the late forties. Harsono's heightened sensitivity as an artist engaged with social-political discourses moves him further, bringing him to the awareness about the importance of the "truth of the chronicle" of an event; namely the what, when, who and whereabouts of the mostly-nameless victims (Taufik Abdullah; 1997).

The project continued as if they, the victims, had trapped him into a tunnel with a promise of light at its end. In this exhibition, Harsono shows us his "activism", how he went on a pilgrimage to visit the victims and with great curiosity traced the stories or the pathways of chaos around the time of the second arrival of the Dutch, 1947 – 1948. He discovered many names, resource persons, locations and meanings of the event through conversations with the family of the victims, the living witnesses and historians, alongside his visits to the silent graves, in a number of small towns in Central and East Java.

He realizes that the stories have inevitably drowned or been forgotten by the "ethical systems" of the grand history, rife as it is with nationalistic slogans. Those who doubt the historical discourse with ostensible legitimate basis will say that today we no longer live in such a system, but rather in what we call "morality".



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Harsono came from a Chinese family. He was born and grew up in Indonesia and experienced the times when the New Order regime (1966-1998) sank its repressive political claw on cultures stigmatized as alien, whose practices were never seen as suitable for the “Indonesian national character”. In the time long past, as a legacy of political policies of the colonial era, the Chinese in Indonesia had always been negatively perceived as allies of the foreign, not “native” enough, “non-indigenous”, outside of the nationalist groups and even conceived as a distinct threat in a range of competitions in different walks of life. “Furors” about the Chinese in Indonesia—especially after the Indonesian Independence in 1945—demonstrate how the vulnerability contained in the issue can be contrived as politicking maneuvers in the effort to bring the scapegoat to the altar of the victims.

Harsono discovered various facts about the role of the Chinese in the Indonesian politics, even in key pre-Independence political institutions such as the Committee for the Preparatory Work for Indonesian Independence (BPUPKI, 1945), in which a number of Chinese had been involved. To him, the Chinese in Indonesia have for long not been a “part-of-no-part”, to use Rancière’s term. During the Committee’s meeting on June 1, 1945, Sukarno—who would become the first president of Indonesia—made a speech about Pancasila, the five principles of the nation that would serve as the main foundational reference of the Republic of Indonesia to this day. For Harsono, the Chinese-Malay literature is not a “part-of-no-part” of the official treasury of the Indonesian literature, in which many Chinese writers have long been involved.

It is in his unwavering stance about the moralistic narrative context, laden as it is with his defense for the nameless victims, that Harsono experiences his spring time of pilgrimage, in his personal trauma and his criticism against the grand texts of “history”, with the poetic textuality and metaphors of his own arrangement. The prose of his search for the narratives of “truth” about these forgotten traces can subsequently be perceived as the coming beauty of spring...

To download the artwork images and exhibition shots, click the following links:

Low resolution (72 dpi) <http://www.mediafire.com/?7f6ua19hc14uc8b>

High resolution (300 dpi) <http://www.mediafire.com/?okg4i5ixj81qgsm>

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For further enquiries, contact:

Ratna Mufida (Hyphen)

m. +62817277679

e. ratnamufida@yahoo.com

e. poke@hyphen.web.id