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Nature Acts as our Teacher: Minangkabau Art World Making in Indonesia

By

Katherine L. Bruhn

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in South & Southeast Asian Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Associate Professor Sylvia Tiwon, Co-chair Associate Professor Anneka Lenssen, Co-chair Associate Professor Sugata Ray Professor Penelope Edwards

Fall 2023

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#### Abstract

## Nature Acts as our Teacher: Minangkabau Art World Making in Indonesia

by

## Katherine L. Bruhn

#### Doctor of Philosophy in South & Southeast Asian Studies

## University of California, Berkeley

#### Associate Professor Sylvia Tiwon & Associate Professor Anneka Lenssen, Co-Chairs

This dissertation examines the work of modern and contemporary artists associated with the Minangkabau ethnic group. Today, this group is roughly synonymous with the Indonesian province of West Sumatra. It is also recognized as the world's largest matrilineal Muslim society. Throughout history because men had no right to immovable property, this contributed to a propensity for outward migration (*merantan*) and shaped what is imagined as the Minangkabau world (*alam Minangkabau*). This multi-sited world that is constituted by a homeland and diaspora and is shaped by factors like its members' association with Minangkabau history, culture, and language rather than fixed geographic boundaries is the focus of this study that spans the late-colonial era (c. 1900) to the present.

My focus is on artists from Minangkabau because they occupy a double place in Indonesian modern and contemporary art historiography. Not only do artists from Minangkabau hold roles as national pioneers who are credited with achieving successes in the name of Indonesia but also, the work of artists from Minangkabau has consistently been recognized because of how it diverges from dominant streams of expression. Until recently, little attention was paid to what might have contributed to such trends. In this dissertation I show that thanks to the commercial success of certain artists from Minangkabau along with the growth of two artist communities that are part of the Minangkabau diaspora in Java, there is now a greater coherence around Minangkabau identity in art. This makes it possible to trace a history of visual expression specific to Minangkabau that demonstrates a unique relationship to nature and ecosystems and is inseparable from Minangkabau customary norms (*adat*).

This dissertation makes three broad contributions. First, it engages with a history of art making associated with the work of modern and contemporary artists in and from Minangkabau. To date, writing on Indonesian art history has centered on the island of Java. This is because the nation's preeminent art schools are located there along with the greatest concentration of artists. Second, by focusing on how *merantau* has shaped the careers of artists associated with Minangkabau and contributed to what I contend is a contemporary Minangkabau art world, it highlights the ways that historical modes of world-making challenge prescriptive constructures like the nation-state and politicized ideas of regional cohesion. Third, through an engagement with *adat* and *alam* (nature, universe, and realms of perception), it contributes to scholarship that is focused on decolonizing the Anthropocene by foregrounding local or non-Western bodies of knowledge.

In memory of my father, Michael B. Bruhn (1954 – 2020) who inspired my love of travel, and Jeffrey A. Hadler (1968 – 2017) who introduced me to Minangkabau.

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#### Acknowledgements

In 2009, I traveled to Indonesia for the first time as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant. With no real knowledge of Indonesian history, culture, or language I found myself in a small village on the island of Sulawesi nine hours from the nearest airport and Internet café. While at the outset I was not sure how I would make it nine-months in this context, today, I know I will remain forever grateful for this experience and to the people of Majene. For, it was there that I first experienced the warmth and welcoming character of so many in Indonesia that have made me feel like I have a home on the other side of the world. Since this first trip I have been beyond blessed to meet so many artists, teachers, and friends both in Indonesia and beyond that have not only made the research for this dissertation possible but also, meaningful. As such, as is practice in Indonesian before expressing my gratitude to any one individual or community I must instead start by asking for forgiveness, noting that any admissions are mine alone. Nonetheless, one must start somewhere and so it is to my mentors that I express my foremost gratitude.

This project began under the guidance of Jeffrey Hadler. Without him, I would not have found my way to Minangkabau. As such, not a day has gone by that I have not wondered what he would have made of the argument I lay out in the pages that follow. His dedication to his craft and even more so his students, colleagues, and family will forever serve as an example of the type of teacher, mentor, and human I aspire to be. I have also benefited immensely from other members of my committee for whom I cannot imagine this project without. Anneka Lenssen instilled in me a confidence as an academic and even more so, an art historian. At different stages of this project, she provided thoughtful and constructive feedback encouraging me to think broadly about the global relevance of my work. Sylvia Tiwon deepened my knowledge in Indonesian literature and cultural traditions and nurtured a rigorous attention to language. Sugata Ray's thought-provoking seminars helped me to think transregionally, across time periods, and critically about historiographical frameworks. Penny Edwards was a constant advocate. I am grateful for her willingness to step in as a reader in the final stages of this project. My thanks are also due to members of the Department of South & Southeast Asian Studies including Munis Faruqui, Ninik Lunde, Chat Aban, Tita Joi, Rahul Parsons, and Kristen Brooks.

I would not have found my way to Berkeley if it were not for certain mentors at earlier stages of my graduate journey. At Ohio University, Elizabeth Collins and Gene Ammarell not only helped me to establish a foundation in Southeast Asian and Indonesian Studies but also encouraged me to pursue a PhD. I am grateful that my relationship with Elizabeth has continued to grow in Berkeley. She is to thank for introductions to individuals in Indonesia who like Elizabeth, I now consider family. Pak Iman and Ibu Gita, Proklamasi will always be a home away from home in Jakarta.

Since that first trip to Indonesia fifteen years ago, I have benefited from fellowships that have made it possible for me to return to Indonesia time and again, often in the context of language study. From 2011 – 2012, I spent one year in Yogyakarta during which I studied Indonesian and Javanese at Wisma Bahasa. This experience helped me to build a linguistic foundation that remains integral to my work. I am grateful to both Pak Wanto and Mbak Roro who were my primary teachers during that time. Since then, my doctoral work and dissertation research has been supported by numerous funding sources. The first three years of my program I was a recipient of a Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need Fellowship. Each summer leading up to my extended fieldwork I benefited from the support of the Department of South & Southeast Asian Studies at Berkeley and a Foreign Language & Area Studies Summer Fellowship. From 2016 – 2018, my dissertation fieldwork was made possible by a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship, the Social Science Research Council's International Dissertation Research Fellowship, and a grant from the American Institute for Indonesian Studies. Upon my return to Berkeley, I was the recipient of a Global Urban Humanities Townsend Fellowship. This opportunity gave me time and space to not only connect with scholars across campus during weekly meetings but also formulate my initial arguments that remain central to this project. While at times these meetings felt daunting and even intimidating, I am forever grateful for the encouragement and inspiration I received. A Summer Dissertation Writing Fellowship from Berkeley's Graduate Division was integral to the last months of writing. Thank you to my daily check in group members Mariagrazia De Luca, Eliot D'Silva, and Ernesto Gutierrez Topete for encouragement and accountability.

In Indonesia, words cannot express the gratitude I have for the artists and communities that are the focus of this project including the Sakato Art Community, the Jendela Art Group, and the Tambo Arts Center. My initial introduction to these groups would not have been possible without the friendship and continual support of Mas Boy. Jasdeep Sandhu and Gajah Gallery were also critical to these introductions and this project. Erizal AS, Stefan Buana, Anton Rais Makoginta, Fika Ria Santika, Jumaldi Alfi, Yunizar, Loli Rusman, Gusmen Heriadi and his family, Abdi Setiawan, and Trien Iien continually opened their studios and/or homes. In West Sumatra, without Novita and Alberto I would have been lost. I am also grateful to Ibrahim Se, Syahrial Yayan, Mamad Ridwan, and Nasrul Palapa for sharing their art and even more so, insights on West Sumatra and Minangkabau. In Java, my research and activities were supported by the Indonesian Institute of Art in Yogyakarta. As my faculty sponsor Mikke Susanto ensured a smooth start to my research. I am thankful for the many afternoons spent at Mikke's house, combing his personal archive and library and spending time with his family. In West Sumatra, my research and activities were supported by the Indonesian Institute of Art in Padang Panjang. At ISI Padang Panjang, I am especially grateful to Tintun Koe and Yade Surayya. I must also thank Heru Joni Putra for insightful conversations on Minangkabau and Esha Tegar Putra for taking time to send me documents after I returned to California. More broadly, I am grateful to the folks at the Indonesian Visual Art Archive, particularly Dwe Rachmanto. The community of Survive Garage, members of Taring Padi and Ketjilbergerak for my earliest insights on collectivism. Invani Lela Herliana for her support with transcriptions. I must also extend my gratitude to Chabib Duta Hapsoro who has been an important interlocutor and friend as well as Aminudin TH Siregar who has shared critical insights on Indonesian art history.

At Berkeley, I had the good fortune of meeting fellow graduate students across disciplines who shaped my thinking and attitude toward the academy in indescribable ways. While academia can be a lonely place, this was never my experience at Berkeley. Trude Renwick, Kashi Gomez, Susan Eberhard, and Shivani Sud thank you for reading numerous drafts, constantly motivating me, and always showing up. Sophia Warshall, Priya Kothari, and Kellie Powell, what immense joy it has been to see our little ones play together. Fellow SSEAS students Megan Hewitt, Kankan Xie, Thiti Jamkajornkeiat, Padma Maitland, Alex Ciolac, Anurag Advani, Daniel Owens, Christian Gilberti, Solihin Bin Samsuri, Janet Um, Hannah Lord Archambault, Lisa Brooks, and Iman Djalius, you helped to make our department a home. Thank you also to Valentina Rozas-Krause, Kimberly Skye Richards, Martha Herrera-Lasso, Caleb Ford, Brandon Kirk Williams, Matt Wade, Rina Priyani, Hong-June Park, and Clare Cameron.

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My family will attest to what has always been my desire to teach. I am blessed to have aunts, uncles, and cousins that continually show enthusiasm for what I do and encourage me at every step of the journey despite what often feel like insurmountable challenges. If it were not for my parents, I would not be where I am today. Thank you for the sacrifices you made so that no matter what passion I had at a given moment I was able to explore it. Mom, thank you for always listening to me and showing interest in my work. I am certain at this point you are also an expert on Indonesian history and culture. Thank you also to my brother, his wife Megan, my niece Maddie, and my nephew Cameron. My final acknowledgement of gratitude is to Nick and Lilou. Nick, you travelled across the world to visit me, endured extended absences, and more than anyone, have experienced the day-to-day struggles of seeing a dissertation come to fruition. Thank you for ensuring I had a home to come back to and building a family with me. Lilou, you arrived in the last two years of writing this dissertation and will likely live with this project for much of your first decade. I cannot wait to show you Indonesia and introduce you to the people and places that I describe in the pages that follow. Thank you for providing me clarity and balance, my love for you and our family knows no bounds.

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## Note on Translation

Unless otherwise noted all translations from Indonesian to English are my own.

Throughout this dissertation I italicize Indonesian words the first time that they are introduced. Thereafter they are not italicized. Longer Indonesian and Minangkabau phrases are italicized throughout.

### Introduction

There is no shortage of indicators of the Minangkabau ethnic group and its diasporic formation in the Indonesian archipelago. For instance, masakan Padang (Padang food) is one the most prolific cuisines; no matter where you go you are likely to find a Padang restaurant, identifiable by its display of stacked plates in the restaurant's front window (I.1). Padang, the name of West Sumatra's provincial capital is used to refer to this type of cuisine, however, it is not specific to this city. Rather, it is identic with Minangkabau, where Minangkabau refers to the ethnic group that is synonymous with the Indonesian province of West Sumatra (Map I.1). The ubiquity of Padang restaurants across the Indonesian archipelago is a testament to Minangkabau merantau (outward migration) and the size of the Minangkabau diaspora. Along with the display of plates in a restaurant's front window another common feature of Padang restaurants is the type of art that is used to decorate a restaurant's walls. This is indicated by two photographs taken at Rumah Makan Duta Minang in the Javanese city of Yogyakarta that feature a calligraphic painting (**fig I.2**) and a landscape painting (fig I.3). As Minangkabau born artist Syaiful Adnan (b. 1957) who created the calligraphic painting hanging at Rumah Makan Duta Minang explains, these styles are popular because they are considered "paling merakyat" or "close to the people."<sup>1</sup> Here, Adnan's reference to "the people" refers to members of the Minangkabau diaspora in Yogyakarta who frequent this restaurant including many of the artists discussed in this dissertation. In this dissertation, I examine the work of visual artists associated with Minangkabau including contemporary artists part of the Sakato Art Community and the Jendela Art Group, both based in Yogyakarta, as well as their predecessors such as landscape painter Wakidi (1889-1979) and modern artists Nashar (1928-94) and Oesman Effendi (1919-85). I show that the "closeness" described by Adnan is inseparable from the centrality of Islam and *adat* (customary norms) to Minangkabau identity, history, and culture and subsequently, the work of visual artists.

Artists from Minangkabau occupy a unique position in Indonesian modern and contemporary art historiography because they tread the line of insider versus outsider. The ubiquity of Padang restaurants outside of West Sumatra exemplifies this and thus, serve as an apt starting point. Padang food is a beloved cuisine amongst Indonesians. It is also a national point of pride because *rendang* (beef slow cooked in coconut milk and spices), a dish synonymous with Padang cuisine, has been recognized as the most delicious food in the world.<sup>2</sup> At the same time Padang restaurants demonstrate the imperative for members of the Minangkabau diaspora to establish sites that offer a sense familiarity and belonging beyond the borders of their homeland. Minangkabau is described as the world's largest matrilineal Muslim society. Historically, this meant that because of matrilineal institutions of descent whereby men have no right to immovable property, they were expected to leave their villages in search of knowledge and wealth in a foreign place.<sup>3</sup> In this study I

<sup>2</sup> Tim Cheung, "Your Pick: World's 50 Best Foods," CNN Travel (2011, 2017),

https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/world-best-foods-readers-choice/index.html.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Interview with Syaiful Adnan, March 1, 2017, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Rudolf Mrazek (1994) describes merantau as a cultural obligation whereby the migrant "took great care, and sometimes great pains, to fulfill his "obligation" to his community—an "obligation not rarely described as a burden or shame. He thought it his greatest attainment to return from rantau a success" (11). For more on the history and significance of merantau to Minangkabau see Mochtar Naim, "Merantau: Minangkabau Voluntary Migration," (PhD diss., University of Singapore, 1976) and Tsuyoshi Kato, *Matriliny and Migration: Evolving Traditions in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982). For more on the more general significance of merantau in contemporary Indonesia see Johan A. Lindquist, *The Anxieties of Mobility: Migration and Tourism in the Indonesian Borderlands* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).

show that merantau remains a cultural imperative that gives shape to the careers of Minangkabau artists. It has also contributed to a unique relationship with home—both physical (i.e., West Sumatra) and metaphorical (i.e., Minangkabau culture).

Despite the expanse of Indonesia's archipelago, its art world has been almost exclusively confined to the island of Java since the late-colonial era. Considered the nation's social, political, and economic center, Java is where Indonesia's preeminent art schools, galleries, and other art infrastructure are located. Since the revolutionary era (c. 1945), artists from Minangkabau have been part of this concentration of the Indonesian art world in Java. Many Minangkabau-born artists who have been recognized as national pioneers and credited for their achievements in the name of Indonesia have done so away from their homeland. Their work, despite being at the forefront of developments in both modern and contemporary art, has consistently been recognized for its divergence from dominant streams of expression. Until recently, little attention was paid to factors that might have contributed to these trends.

In the contemporary era, the commercial success and the global art world's recognition of Minangkabau born artists like members of the Jendela Art Group, along with the growth of the Sakato Art Community part of the Minangkabau diaspora in Java have contributed to a greater coherence around Minangkabau identity in art. This coherence is evidenced by factors including connections drawn by non-Minangkabau curators and art writers between the work and activities of artists associated with Minangkabau and Minangkabau adat. Efforts of groups such as Sakato to rebrand themselves through clear reference to Minangkabau history, culture, and adat. And what I show is the growth of a Minangkabau contemporary art world that mirrors what has long been imagined as *"Alam Minangkabau"* (the Minangkabau World). This multi-sited world is structured by adat and is constituted by a static homeland and an ever-expanding diaspora. In this study the Minangkabau diaspora is identic with the cities of Yogyakarta and Jakarta, both on the island of Java.<sup>4</sup>

The term adat is used across maritime Southeast Asia, a region that includes Indonesia along with Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, the Philippines, and East Timor. In the simplest of terms, adat can be understood as a reference to the local customs and customary laws that existed before the arrival of world religions.<sup>5</sup> Notably, while adat is most often associated with things like traditional legal codes, it also encompasses different forms of cultural expression that transmit adat's teachings.<sup>6</sup> In Minangkabau, adat is credited with the existence of a matriarchy and the forces that inspired and in turn shaped its outward expression, namely the unlikely synthesis of Islam and matrilineal institutions of descent.<sup>7</sup> In this dissertation adat serves as an entry point to track a history of visual

Although Lindquist describes merantau as a "pan-Indonesian phenomenon as increasing numbers of Indonesians have transformed into migrants in search of new forms of life and labor," I contend that for certain regions and groups like Minangkabau merantau holds specific cultural significance as demonstrated in this dissertation (11).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Taufik Abdullah, "Modernization in the Minangkabau World: West Sumatra in the Early Decades of the Twentieth Century," in *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, ed. by Claire Holt (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 187.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> For more on the history of how the term adat traveled from the Arabic speaking world to Southeast Asia and was in turn, translated into local usage there see Mona Abaza, "'*Ada/*Custom in the Middle East and Southeast Asia," in *Words in Motion: Toward a Global Lexicon*, eds. Carol Gluck and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 67-82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Gerlov van Engelenhoven, "From Indigenous Customary Law to Diasporic Cultural Heritage: Reappropriations of Adat Throughout the History of Moluccan Postcolonial Migration," *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law-Revue Internationale de Sémiotique Juridique* 34, no. 3 (2021): 696.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> My use of the term matriarchy, from the Dutch *matriarchaat* follows other scholars of Minangkabau like Peggy Reeves (2002) and Jeffrey Hadler (2008) who retain the use of this term as a nod to and respect for Minangkabau usage in their descriptions of what is the matrifocal character of this group rooted in matrilineal institutions of descent. In her study of the Minangkabau matriarchy in the last decades of the twentieth century, Reeves begins with a reflection on the history

expression specific to Minangkabau. This approach follows that of historian Leonard Y. Andaya, who asserts in his study of the "branches" of Malay identity that the matriarchy and merantau are the "primary elements constituting the 'boundaries' of Minangkabau ethnicity."<sup>8</sup> Along with a consideration of how merantau has and continues to give shape to the careers of artists associated with Minangkabau, my attention to adat is centered on its relationship to *alam*. From Arabic, this term is translated in modern Indonesian as "nature," "universe," and "realms of perception."<sup>9</sup> Throughout history alam and the idea that "nature acts as our teacher" (*alam takambang jadi guru*) have contributed to the character of Minangkabau cultural expression both linguistic and visual. I draw a connection between earlier forms of Minangkabau cultural expression including the motifs found in traditional textiles and architectural forms and the work of modern and contemporary artists associated with Minangkabau to not only demonstrate a continuity between forms but also dismantle the idea that the visual expression of nature in Indonesian art is a colonial introduction.

The history of modern art in Indonesia is rooted in the aspirations of nationalist artists from the turn of the twentieth century. Within this context, landscape painting became a primary point of resistance for those who desired to produce art that depicts the realities of the Indonesian people and develop a style of art making that reflects an Indonesian identity.<sup>10</sup> In the late-colonial era, paintings done in what is referred to as the *"Mooi Indie"* (beautiful Indies) style dominated the art world of the Dutch East Indies.<sup>11</sup> Like classic landscape paintings marked by a romanticism and interest in the sublime, Mooi Indie paintings were idealistic depictions of the archipelago's countryside that erased the evils of colonialism.<sup>12</sup> The landscape painting hanging at Rumah Makan Duta Minang follows certain conventions of Mooi Indie paintings. For instance, it depicts rice fields, a mountain, small figures tending the fields, and a stream in the painting's foreground. Because of the size of these figures and the painting's panoramic vantagepoint we can neither see their faces or evidence of their labor. The artist who created this painting is unknown. It is likely that it was not even painted by a Minangkabau born artist. In Yogyakarta, decorative paintings like this one can be purchased near Gadjah Mada University along Jalan Colombo. The commercial character of this

of this term alongside other terms more commonly used to describe societies like Minangkabau including "matricentric" or "matrifocal." As she elaborates, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the term matriarchy was first used, it was as an analogy with patriarchy. However, because of the reality that few societies mirror what Hadler terms the "men-oppressing image of patriarchy" (including Minangkabau) new terms arose like matricentric and matrifocal to avoid the suggestion of the political supremacy of women (7). Nevertheless, in Minangkabau over time, the use of the term matriarchate has persisted and as Sanday demonstrates through her study, should not be "abolished" but rather, "refurbished" (Sanday xi).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Leonard Y. Andaya, *Leaves of the Same Tree: Trade and Ethnicity in the Straits of Melaka* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> John M. Echols and Hassan Shadily, *Kamus Indonesia-Inggris (Indonesia-English Dictionary)*, edited by John U. Wolff and James T. Collins (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1989), 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> For an overview of the first decades of modern art history in Indonesia, see Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, Ithaca). Here I cite Holt as a central and key source because of what I argue later in the dissertation has been the impact of this monograph on the historiography of Indonesian art. For an example of how subsequent studies in English engage Holt's timeline and add onto it because of more current research aimed at charting a historiography of Indonesian art see Astri Wright, *Soul, Spirit, and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994). For a critical engagement with Sudjojono's position in the historiography of Indonesian modern art see Kevin Chua, "Courbet After Sudjojono," *Art History* 41, no. 2 (2018): 292-317.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> The term Mooi Indie is attributed to an album of watercolors produced by Dutch artist Fred van Rossum du Chattel. This album was published in 1913 and included twelve watercolors that depicted Indonesia's countryside, then the Dutch East Indies. See chapter three of this dissertation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> See Susie Protschky, *Images of the Tropics: Environment and Visual Culture in Colonial Indonesia* for more on the history of how visual culture in the Dutch East Indies, including painting, portrayed a particular relationship to and image of the natural world.

painting or the economic value it holds parallels Mooi Indie paintings and was a primary reason why nationalist artists rejected this genre. It also raises the question: what is it about decorative painting like this one, possibly created by a non-Minangkabau artist, that renders it as an acceptable representation to the members of the Minangkabau diaspora?

Many of the artists that propagated the Mooi Indie style were foreign born, from Europe and worked in occupations ranging from planting and administration to the military. As stakeholders in the stability of Dutch colonial rule committed to the tranquil version of the Indies that they portrayed for the nostalgic value it held, the perception arose amongst artists native to Indonesia like revolutionary artist Sindudarsono Sudjojono (1913–85) that these artists were not devoted to the land or its people.<sup>13</sup> Nationalist historiography contends that while landscape painting in Indonesia tends to mimic colonial ways of seeing, in the province of West Sumatra, landscape painting as it is practiced by the Minangkabau ethnic group took a different trajectory. As art historian Aminudin TH Siregar asserts, landscape painting has played a central role in this history because of its position as a form of "traditional heritage" amongst Minangkabau painters.<sup>14</sup> This is thanks to the legacy of Mooi Indie landscape painter Wakidi (1889 – 1979) who is considered the founding father of a modern art tradition in West Sumatra. It is evidenced by the ongoing popularity of landscape paintings for decorative purposes like at Rumah Makan Duta Minang and as a means to engage with West Sumatra's history of art. It can also be attributed to the centrality of alam to a Minangkabau worldview.

## Minangkabau and Adat

Identity is complicated by the currents of history. In the case of artists born in or associated with Minangkabau, mobility and its effects like the challenge and discomfort posed as an outsider and an ongoing relationship to home has defined the lives of each artist under examination. This study spans the late-colonial era (c. 1900) to the present. It encompasses the last decades of Dutch colonial rule (1900–42), Japanese occupation (1942–45), Indonesia's revolutionary struggle (1945–49), the first decades of independence, the elimination of Indonesia's communist party and mass killing of communist sympathizers (1965–68), Suharto's New Order (1966–98), and the Reformasi/post-Reformasi eras (1998–present). In short, it covers more than a century of political tumult marked by violence, regime change, and contemporary realities like globalization.

Given this political and social history along with the mobility of the artists discussed it is of no surprise that Minangkabau is but one identity relevant to the group of individuals and art works analyzed in this dissertation. Some of the artists who I identify as either "Minangkabau-born" or "associated with Minangkabau" prefer to refer to themselves as "contemporary artists" or "Yogyakarta artists," where Yogyakarta refers to the city in Java that is now home to the largest population of Minangkabau-born contemporary artists in Indonesia. Others were not born in Minangkabau but chose to spend their lives in West Sumatra. For example, although Wakidi's parents were Javanese, I identify him as "associated with Minangkabau" because he spent his life in West Sumatra. Further, certain artists like the members of the Jendela Art Group are internationally recognized. They have shown their work in sites across the globe where identifiers like nationality that are more legible to a diverse global audience take precedence. Exemplified by Jendela member

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Revolutionary artist Sindudarsono Sudjojono is recognized for his statements speaking out against the dominance of landscape painting and the work of foreign-born artists. See his collection of essays published in 1946 titled *Seni Loekis, Kesenian, dan Seniman.* See also chapter 3 of this dissertation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Aminudin TH Siregar, "Painting Darek," in Erizal AS Darek #1: Bentang Alam (Singapore: Gajah Gallery, 2022), 31.

Handiwirman Saputra (b. 1975) an inattention to scales of belonging like regional and ethnic identity misses important facets of an artist's work. Specifically, in the case of Handiwirman this concerns adat and alam.

In 2019, work by Handiwirman Saputra was included in the main exhibition of the Venice Biennale. Founded in 1895, the Venice Biennale is the oldest and one of if not the most prestigious biennials globally. An artist's inclusion in its main exhibition marks their position in the upper echelons of the global contemporary art world.<sup>15</sup> A photograph (**fig I.4**) depicts three-large scale sculptures by Handiwirman that were displayed together at Venice. The tall cylindrical form and the form hanging from the ceiling are both part of Handiwirman's Tak Berakar, Tak Berpucuk (No Roots, No Shoots) series. As is characteristic of Handiwirman's practice, this series was sparked by the artist's curiosity with and subsequent investigation of mundane objects part of an everyday experience. In this instance, it was the artist's encounter with a stretch of river (fig I.5) near his home in Yogyakarta where trash and bits of cloth had become entwined with the roots of a bamboo grove on the river's edge. It is impossible to determine how many works are part of this series that was started in 2010 and includes objects like the large-scale sculptures and this painting (fig I.6) that were all on display at Venice. Handiwirman's inclusion in the Venice Biennale can be understood in relation to its curatorial theme, "May You Live in Interesting Times."<sup>16</sup> Said to be a traditional Chinese curse, this phrase while seemingly a blessing is used ironically. That is, while we all know that life is better in uninteresting times or those marked by peace, tranquility, and even monotony, to suggest that someone live in interesting times is to wish them a life of trouble or conflict. Ralph Rugoff, the artistic director of this edition of the Venice Biennale attributed his interest in this expression to two factors. First, the way that its ambiguity reflects our current times. Second, his desire to create an exhibition that did not address social issues directly but rather, underlined art's ability to provide alternate realities and question habits of thought.<sup>17</sup> Handiwirman's work was a logical inclusion because according to the placard (fig I.7) that accompanied his work it is rooted in his commitment to "seeing" and "looking" as a strategy to make the familiar strange. Notably, this placard identifies Handiwirman as Indonesian and notes that he lives and works in the city of Yogyakarta. It neither mentions his connection to Minangkabau nor the significance of this aspect of the artist's identity for an understanding of the Tak Berakar, Tak Berpucuk series.

Minangkabau curator Anton Rais Makoginta explained to me that the title *Tak Berakar, Tak Berpucuk* refers to the Minangkabau proverb "*ka ateh indak bapucuak, ka bawah indak baurek, ditangah dilariak kumbang.*"<sup>18</sup> This proverb is an expression of adat. It is understood as an oath that predates Islam and can be translated as "on the top no shoots, from the bottom no roots, the middle eaten out by beetles." Traditionally, it would have been pronounced by an individual prior to their assumption of an official role in the community. For instance, as a *penghulu* (village chief) or *pemangku adat* (keeper of or expert on adat). In this context, it portrays the idea that if one does not fulfill the obligations inherent to that role, they will suffer the fate of the tree that uprooted from the earth, withers and is eventually eaten by bugs.<sup>19</sup> By drawing on this oath that is structured by an attention to alam (nature) Handiwirman uses adat as a means to structure and make sense of his engagement

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Handiwirman is the third artist from Indonesia to be invited to participate in the main exhibition of the Venice Biennale. In 1954, Affandi was the first artist to be included and in 2003, Heri Dono was the second artist to be included. Many countries have never received this honor.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> This was the 58<sup>th</sup> edition of the Venice Biennale. It was held from May 11 – November 24, 2019.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ralph Rugoff, "May You Live in Interesting Times," in *May You Live in Interesting Times: Biennale Arte 2019 Exhibition* (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 2019), 26-43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Conversation with Anton Rais Makoginta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> This interpretation is taken from Yos Magek Bapayuang, *Patatah-Patitih Minangkabau* (Jakarta: Anggota Ikapi DKI Jakarta, 2016), 157.

with a tangible manifestation of alam namely, the riverbed near his home in Yogyakarta. This association adds a layer of meaning to *Tak Berakar, Tak Berpucuk* series. It is not just about looking and seeing. Rather, it is a statement on our responsibility to the earth and the consequences that will result if we do not take care of the environment. By designating an artist as either "Minangkabauborn" or "associated with Minangkabau" establishes that this region and ethnicity are meaningful to an individual and their art. Along with its association to adat and alam, Handiwirman's *Tak Berakar, Tak Berpucuk* series is significant because it points to the connection between language use in Minangkabau and Minangkabau adat. Figurative speech like this oath that are known collectively as *peribahasa* fall under the umbrella of adat because they transmit adat's teachings. A brief look at the history of adat in Indonesia demonstrates that such forms of cultural expression are only one manifestation of adat.

Adat, understood in Indonesia as the customary norms that structured social life before the arrival of world religions specifically Islam, has been described as a word in motion; that is, it has been continually remade at different scales.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, it has impacted the shape of "worlds" that are themselves an entanglement of local, national, regional, and global forces.<sup>21</sup> From Arabic, the word adat traveled with the spread of Islam to Southeast Asia sometime in the thirteenth century where it was used to describe local customs that could not be incorporated into Islamic law.<sup>22</sup> Over time adat has been shaped and reshaped by colonial and nationalist interests.<sup>23</sup>

Under the Dutch colonial regime adat played a part in colonial administration. Because of its centrality to native social life in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries efforts were made to codify and systematize adat. In the words of Franz and Keebet Von Benda-Beckmann, the Dutch were aware of adat's relevance in most but not all regions of Indonesia as well as its character as a "more or less institutionalized set of rules and procedures."<sup>24</sup> Adat was understood to inform all areas of social life including marriage, property and inheritance, political authority, and decision-making processes and was thus, seen as a potential tool to advance colonial interests.<sup>25</sup>

Dutch legal scholar Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje's 1893 publication *de Atjehers* (The Acehnese) was the first comprehensive study of a specific region and group's adat.<sup>26</sup> The reason why he focused on Aceh rather than another area of the archipelago is understood in the context of the Aceh War (1883–1904) that was fought between the Acehnese Sultanate, a predominantly Islamic state, and Dutch colonial forces. With an interest in reducing the influence of Islamic leaders like those in Aceh, the colonial regime saw promise in promoting adat and adat leaders. Hurgronje's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> My use of the term "word in motion" draws on Carol Gluck and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Words in Motion: Toward a Global Lexicon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> According to Dutch scholar Gerlov van Engelenhoven (2020), adat was introduced by Islamic merchants in Maluku. It then spread across the Indonesian archipelago from the 1200s onward (696).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> There is a substantial body of literature on the history of adat during the colonial era. For a succinct overview of this history, see C. Fasseur, "Colonial Dilemma: Van Vollenhoven and the Struggle Between *Adat* Law and Western Law in Indonesia" in *The Revival of Tradition in Indonesian Politics: The Deployment of Adat from Colonialism to Indigenism*, ed. Jamie S. Davidson and David Henley (London: Routledge, 2007), 50-67. For a more comprehensive overview, see M.B. Hooker, *Adat Law in Modern Indonesia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) and Peter J. Burns, *The Leiden Legacy: Concepts of Law in Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV, 2004).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Franz Von Benda-Beckmann and Keebet Von Benda-Beckmann, "Myths and Stereotypes About Adat Law: A Reassessment of Van Vollenhoven in the Light of Current Struggles Over Adat Law in Indonesia," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-*, *Land- en Volkenkunde* 167, no. 2/3 (2011), 171.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, De Atjehers (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1893).

study contributed to this by helping to "disentangle" Islam and adat.<sup>27</sup> This reflects what legal studies scholar Mahadi notes was the conceptualization of Islamic law and adat as antagonistic opposites by the colonial regime.<sup>28</sup>

Efforts to reform the Dutch legal system in the early-twentieth century played a central role in the codification of adat. In 1904, a proposal was put forward by the colonial government to unify all law in the colony under a single legal system modeled on the Dutch Civil Code.<sup>29</sup> This idea was rejected by figures such as Dutch legal scholar Cornelis van Vollenhoven who argued for a dual legal system.<sup>30</sup> Van Vollenhoven's interest in and promotion of adat contributed to his formalization of the field of "adat studies" at Leiden University in the Netherlands. He and his students subsequently systematized the description and analysis of adat across the archipelago, which they divided into nineteen distinct adat areas.<sup>31</sup> Despite adat's Arabic roots its codification was not confined to areas across the archipelago that identified with Islam. Bali and Lombok were proposed as a single grouping.<sup>32</sup> This pairing is notable because whereas Bali's population is predominantly Hindu, Lombok is predominantly Muslim. Until now, adat is not confined to groups that identify as Muslim and after Indonesia's independence became a way to promote the nation's diversity.

The desire to foster a unitary state followed the recognition of Indonesia's independence in 1949. In consequence, adat further transformed—or, as anthropologist Gregory Acciaioli puts it, "eroded."<sup>33</sup> This was because of the promotion of its "aesthetic value" through tangible forms like regional performance and material culture including dress and architectural forms that act like "vehicles" for the transmission of adat's teachings.<sup>34</sup> The New Order state (1966–98) recognized Indonesia's cultural diversity through its promotion of the national motto "Unity in Diversity" (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*); but, in reality, as Indonesianist David Henley explains, attention to cultural difference or ethnic identity was neither associated with nor did it result in political rights.<sup>35</sup> In other words, adat moved away from legal matters. Instead, adat was associated with the promotion of regional art forms and cultural expression. In Minangkabau the material expression of peribahasa in the motifs that decorate traditional textiles (*songket*) (**fig I.8**) and architectural forms, like the matrifocal longhouse (*rumah gadang*) (**fig I.9**) are considered expressions of adat.

In the 1990s, in the context of growing tensions and resistance against the New Order state, adat took on significance for activists and communities focused on reclaiming resources that were seized by the New Order in the 1970s. Under the New Order state significant amounts of land were

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "Adat/Indigenous: Indigeneity in Motion," in Words in Motion: Towards a Global Lexicon, edited by Carol Gluck and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (Durham: Duke University Press), 49.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Mahadi is cited in Patricia Spyer, "Diversity with a Difference: Adat and the New Order in Aru (Eastern Indonesia," *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 1 (Feb 1996): 25-50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Gerlov van Engelenhoven, "From Indigenous Customary Law to Diasporic Cultural Heritage: Reappropriations of Adat Throughout the History of Moluccan Postcolonial Migration," *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law-Revue Internationale de Sémiotique Juridique* 34, no. 3 (2021): 701. <sup>30</sup>Ibid., 701-702.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> C. Fasseur, "Colonial Dilemma: Van Vollenhoven and the Struggle Between *Adat* Law and Western Law in Indonesia" in *The Revival of Tradition in Indonesian Politics: The Deployment of Adat from Colonialism to Indigenism*, ed. Jamie S. Davidson and David Henley (London: Routledge, 2007), 54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Cornelis van Vollenhoven, *Van Vollenhoven on Indonesian Adat Law*, ed. J.F. Holleman (Netherlands: Koninklijk Instituut Voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, 1981).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Greg Acciaioli, "Culture as Art: From Practice to Spectacle in Indonesia," *Canberra Anthropology*, 8, no. 1-2 (1985): 148-172.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ibid.; Gerlov van Engelenhoven, "From Indigenous Customary Law to Diasporic Cultural Heritage: Reappropriations of Adat Throughout the History of Moluccan Postcolonial Migration," 696.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> David Henley, "In the Name of *Adat*: Regional Perspectives on Reform, Tradition, and Democracy in Indonesia," *Modern Asian Studies* 42, no. 4 (2008): 827.

sold off to support foreign investment in the name of nationalist development.<sup>36</sup> In this context a correspondence between adat and indigeneity came into play. This correspondence was connected to the translation of the ILO Convention (Indigenous and Tribal People Convention) 169 from English to Indonesian in 1994. This convention was established in 1989 and is the major binding international convention on indigenous peoples and tribal peoples. As anthropologist Anna Tsing explains, in Indonesia when this convention was translated the term *"masyarakat adat"* (adat communities) was used to refer to "indigenous peoples."<sup>37</sup> This correspondence between adat and indigeneity was problematic because the Indonesian translators of ILO Convention 169 did not account for debates associated with the term "indigenous" in Asia. They also identified certain groups as masyakarat adat that were not normally thought about in this way.<sup>38</sup>

The global uptick in the use of the term "indigenous" in the 1970s resulted in debate regarding the relevance of this term to Asia.<sup>39</sup> Under the New Order state in Indonesia, conflict over which if any group in Indonesia should be deemed indigenous was reflected by the line that either Indonesia is a nation with no indigenous people or all Indonesians are equally indigenous.<sup>40</sup> As anthropologist Tania Li asserts, "the term 'indigenous' is more imperative than descriptive, referring to a quality that emerges in the course of struggles over rights to territories, resources, and cultural respect."<sup>41</sup> Because of this, a group's self-identification with the descriptor indigenous and subsequently in Indonesia, masyarakat adat is a kind of "positioning." It is not "natural or inevitable," neither is it "invented, adopted, or imposed."<sup>42</sup> Li's assertions are significant in the context of this dissertation precisely because none of the artists under examination position themselves as members of masyarakat adat. However, facets of adat inform the work of and social interactions between Minangkabau-born artists.

This history of adat demonstrates how it has been shaped and reshaped by varying interests. Under the Dutch colonial regime adat had a direct relationship to native law and legal matters. After Indonesia's recognized independence in 1949, because of adat's association with tangible forms like regional performance and material culture its political import lessened. In the 1990s, due to adat's association with indigenous rights adat took on new political meaning through its use by agrarian movements focused on land rights and ownership that identified as masyarakat adat. These areas are important for an understanding of adat, however, they are not central to my engagement with adat. Instead, my interest is in adat's relationship to cultural expression because of what I show it reveals concerning the continuity between traditional forms of visual culture in Minangkabau and the work of modern and contemporary Minangkabau-born artists like Handiwirman Saputra. Central to this continuity is the intersection of linguistic and visual expression in Minangkabau and the relationship of each to alam.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "*Adat*/Indigenous: Indigeneity in Motion," 44.; Tania Murray Li, "Masyarakat Adat, Difference, and the Limits of Recognition in Indonesia's Forest Zone," *Modern Asian Studies* 35, no. 3 (2001): 646.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "Adat/Indigenous: Indigeneity in Motion," 45-46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Tania Murray Li, "Articulating Indigenous Identity in Indonesia: Resources Politics and the Tribal Slot," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no.1 (2000): 149-179.; For more on how scholars perceived the challenges posed by the term indigenous in Asian contexts see Benedict Kingsbury, "Indigenous Peoples" as an International Legal Concept" in *Indigenous Peoples of Asia*, eds. R.H. Barnes, Andrew Gray, and Benedict Kingsbury (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 1995), 13-34.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Tania Murray Li, "Articulating Indigenous Identity in Indonesia: Resources Politics and the Tribal Slot," 149.
<sup>41</sup> Tania Murray Li, "Locating Indigenous Environmental Knowledge in Indonesia," in *Indigenous Environmental Knowledge and its Transformations: Critical Anthropological Perspectives*, eds. Roy Ellen, Peter Parkes, and Alan Bicker (Harwood Academic Publishers, 2005), 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Tania Murray Li, "Articulating Indigenous Identity in Indonesia: Resources Politics and the Tribal Slot," 151.

### Nature Acts as our Teacher: Adat and Islam

The phrase "*alam takambang jadi guru*" (nature acts as our teacher) is often repeated among artists in Minangkabau and the diaspora in Java. The adage is seen as the overarching principle of Minangkabau culture. It informs the character of adat and is understood as central to the unlikely synthesis of adat—rooted in the maintenance of the matriarchy—and Islam. In Minangkabau the early process of Islamization is understood to have occurred not by force but rather by a redefinition of the Minangkabau world that accommodated Islam.<sup>43</sup> As Minangkabau born philosopher M. Nasroen explains in his work on the philosophical basis of Minangkabau adat, the synthesis of adat and Islam was possible because both systems were grounded on an understanding of and ability to interpret the natural world.<sup>44</sup> This supported the perception that Islam was adat's perfected form and thus, each system was able to coexist.<sup>45</sup>

Alam's centrality to Minangkabau is also evidenced by the reality that the Minangkabau world is known as "Alam Minangkabau." Minangkabau born writer A. A. Navis notes in his study of Minangkabau culture and adat that in Minangkabau, "alam is everything."<sup>46</sup> As indicated by alam's translation as "nature," "universe," and "realms of perception" it is both tangible and intangible. Alam not only refers to the physical reality that constitutes the world around us but also it denotes an imperceptible reality that arises from our subconscious. The oath that informed the title of Handiwirman's *Tak Berakar, Tak Berpucuk* series and is understood as an expression of adat demonstrates how an attention to the physical realities of alam structure adat expressions. To further dissect how traditionally, an attention to alam structured language and even more so, informed Minangkabau visual culture I will look at the intersection of a short poem (*pantun*) and its associated motif, *pucuak rabuang* (young bamboo shoot) (**fig I.10**).

When the bamboo is young it is called <i>rabuang</i> .	(dek ketek banamo rabuang)
When it is mature it is called <i>batuang</i> .	(lah gadang banamo batuang)
When a person is still young, he has a name.	(dek ketek inyo banamo)
When he is grown, he has a title and position.	(lah gadang inyo bagala)
When a person is still young, he is useful.	(hiduik katiko mudo bagunobaguno)
When he is old, he is helpful. <sup>47</sup>	(hiduik katiko tuo tapakai)

This poem portrays the idea that an individual has a function in society and responsibility to their community at each stage of life. As an expression of adat, like the oath discussed previously this poem expresses a moral or guidance for how to live as a member of the community. The bamboo shoot is central to the delivery of this message and the design of the motif *pucuak rabuang*.

Comprised of six lines, this poem can be divided into two parts. The first two lines set the stage for the poem's content, sound, and rhythm. They reference two stages specific to the maturation of a bamboo plant: *rabuang*, or the bud phase (**fig I.11**), and *batuang*, the mature phase (**fig I.12**). From here, lines four through six shifts to the realm of adat with reference to how an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Taufik Abdullah, "Islam, History, and Social Change in Minangkabau," in *Change and Continuity in Minangkabau*, eds. Lynn L. Thomas and Franz von Benda-Becmann (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), 146-147.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> M. Nasroen, *Dasar Falsafah Adat Minangkabau* (Jakarta: C.V. Penerbit 'Pasaman', 1957), 25-27.; Taufik Abdullah, "Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau," *Indonesia* 2 (October 1966), 3.
<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 25-27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> A. A. Navis, *Alam Terkembang Jadi Guru: Adat dan Kebudayaan Minangkabau* (Jakarta: Grafiti Pers, 1984), 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> My translation of this poem is borrowed from Peggy R. Sanday and Suwati Kartiwa, "Cloth and Custom in West Sumatra: The Codification of Minangkabau Worldview," *Expedition* 26, no. 4 (1984): 19.

individual's position in the community is perceived. The idea that one "has a name" calls to mind the fact that in Minangkabau, an individual is associated at birth with a matrilineal clan (*suku*) but later in life might be given a "title and position" like "*ketua*" (head, chief, president) as a leader in their community.<sup>48</sup> Like the bamboo plant that can be eaten when it is *rabuang* and used as functional material when it is *batuang*, an individual has a function in society at each stage of life. The design of the motif *pucuak rabuang* is structured by the physical characteristics of each *rabuang* and *batuang*. The triangular shape of the motif corresponds with the spear-like form of *rabuang* when it emerges from the ground. Its tendril-like edges mimic the drooping leaves and branches of *batuang*. By representing the natural phenomenon that structures the language of the poem, the *pucuak rabuang* motif becomes a visual expression of adat or the moral that is portrayed by the poem. Both instruct an individual how to live as a member of the Minangkabau community.

Minangkabau-born artists tend to regard themselves as part of a historical lineage that begins with the introduction of oil painting during the colonial era and thus, does not include forms like the motif *pucuak rabuang*. For example, Handiwirman asserts that art existed but did not conform to Western definitions of art before the colonial era.<sup>49</sup> Historically, scholars have also placed significant emphasis on the linguistic dexterity and literary prowess of this group. This is demonstrated by different forms of figurative speech and the role of that speech in everyday and ceremonial contexts in Minangkabau.<sup>50</sup> It is also evidenced by the contributions of Minangkabau writers to the development of Indonesian modern literature.<sup>51</sup> A less common subject of inquiry is the unique visual culture specific to this group and region. As one source notes, there are at least ninety-four different motifs found in songket and on the façade of rumah gadang. Each motif signifies a different ideal mode of behavior. Together they "sheathe the wearer in meaning."52 Along with the pucuak rabuang motif, other well-known motifs include kaluak paku (fern leaf tendril) (fig. I.13) and itiak pulang patang (ducks go home in the afternoon) (fig I.14). Whereas the former draws on the structure of a fern leaf to portray the key roles expected of men in Minangkabau, the latter references the character of ducks to symbolize the importance of not straying from Minangkabau culture and adat. Each of these motifs is structured by an attention to naturally occurring phenomenon or alam.

In this dissertation I show that it is possible to trace a connection between earlier forms of visual culture like the motif *pucuak rabuang* and the work of modern and contemporary artists associated with Minangkabau like Handiwirman because of a greater coherence around Minangkabau identity in art. Further, alam and the intersection of linguistic and visual expression are both central to the history of modern and contemporary art in Minangkabau. Crucially, unlike in the

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Historically, Minangkabau was comprised of four primary suku including Bodi, Caniago, Koto, and Piliang.
 <sup>49</sup> Interview with Handiwirman Saputra, September 1, 2019, Jakarta, Indonesia.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> For instance, Minangkabau writer and cultural expert A.A. Navis (1984) writes, that "Minangkabau literature (*kesusastraan*) contains a lot of plastic expressions and is full of allusions (*kiasan* and *sindiran*), parables (*perumpamaan* and *ibarat*), proverbs (*pepatah-petitih* and *mamangan*) that are categorized by experts as *peribahasa* (229). He also states that the most important types of Minangkabau literature are short poems (*pantun*), traditional narrative folktales (*kaba*) and speeches (*pidato*) (232).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> The influence of writers from Minangkabau on the development of a modern literary tradition in Indonesia is indicated by the inclusion of a specific section on "Minangkabau Society and the Indonesian Novel," in A. Teeuw two volume compendium, *Modern Indonesian Literature* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Ibenzani Usman, "Seni Ukir Tradisional Pada Rumah Adat Minangkabau: Teknik, Pola dan Fungsi" (PhD diss., Institut Teknologi Bandung, 1985), 223-225.; Jeffrey Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 44.; For more on the history of textiles in Southeast Asia including their ritual function see Robyn Maxwell, *Textiles of Southeast Asia: Tradition, Trade and Transformation* (Australian National Gallery and Oxford University Press Australia, 1990).; It also noteworthy that traditionally, women were responsible for the production of textiles while men likely produced the carvings found on architectural forms.

example of the poem in which connections between adat and alam are direct, the adage "nature acts as our teacher" tends to be indirect in Minangkabau visual arts. Modern and contemporary artists associated with Minangkabau almost never intentionally draw directly on specific examples of figurative speech in their production of art works or take a specific phenomenon, like the bamboo sprout, as a point of reference. Here, an exception is Handiwirman's *Tak Berakar, Tak Berpucuk* series. Not only does Handiwirman's series start from his observation of a physical reality of alam, in this case, the riverbed near his home in Yogyakarta but also, it is framed by an example of Minangkabau speech that is an expression of adat. More commonly, portrayals of alam are abstract and semi-abstract. This demonstrates that alam's translation as "realms of perception" and "universe" is equally critical to an understanding of the work of artists associated with Minangkabau. Finally, an adherence to adat manifests in the significance of merantau to the development of artistic practices and communities.

In the context of the growing body of literature focused on art's relationship to the environment, this study of modern and contemporary art in Minangkabau makes an important contribution to how we think about the ways that non-Western cosmologies inform an understanding of and relationship to the natural world. At the same time, it underscores the imperative to identify more localized terminologies to diversify how we understand and write about the Anthropocene. Here I follow the work of scholars like Zoe Todd and T.J. Demos while also pushing back on their use of the term "Indigenous" because of what I have shown is its inapplicability to the work of the artists under examination in this study.<sup>53</sup>

Popularized in the early 2000s, the term Anthropocene refers to our current geological epoch whereby humans have become "geological agents" or primary drivers of geological change.<sup>54</sup> With increased recognition and usage of this term have come sharp critiques that draw attention to its inherent inequities. By centering human agency or collapsing this agency into a "universalizing species paradigm" as anthropologist Zoe Todd articulates, "the Anthropocene blunts the distinctions between the people, nations, and collectives who drive the fossil-fuel economy and those who do not."<sup>55</sup> In her work Todd highlights the disparities that define the Anthropocene and our experiences of climate change by emphasizing the imperative to "Indigenize" this term in order to bring out the voices that are not currently being heard in the development of the Anthropocene as a conceptual space.<sup>56</sup> Art historian T. J. Demos, who has written extensively on art's relationship to our current environmental crises, follows in this vein. For instance, Demos opens his book titled *Decolonizing Nature* by questioning what "Indigenous" cosmologies offer in terms of "ecological wisdom about localized and sustainable forms of life based on synergies with biodiverse, healthy environments."<sup>57</sup> In this study I use the terms adat and cosmology interchangeably. In the words of philosopher Nancy Ellen Abrams and physicist Joel R. Primack, traditional cultures all had

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup>In this paragraph I capitalize the term indigenous to acknowledge, as Demos (2016) does, this convention in critical scholarship on indigeneity that he states, "employs this style as a mode of cultural respect for, and political affirmation of, native peoples and their manifold rights" (fn 2, 8). Elsewhere I do not follow this convention because I do not see my work in relation to such scholarship because the artists part of this study do not identify as indigenous. Further, my goal is to highlight divergences from much scholarship on indigeneity and art. On this see, Ian McLean, *Double Desire: Transculturation and Indigenous Contemporary Art* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> For more on the idea of humans as "geological agents," see Dipesh Chakrabarty "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 197-222. For a recent analysis of the Anthropocene that includes the history of this term and analysis of debates associated with its usage, see Jeremy Davies, *The Birth of the Anthropocene* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Zoe Todd, "Indigenizing the Anthropocene," in *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, eds. by Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 244. <sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> T.J. Demos, *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 23.

cosmologies. Not only did cosmology ground people's sense of reality but also, cosmology contributed to codes of behavior. Like modern science it "embedded everydayness in an invisible reality."<sup>58</sup> Like a cosmology, adat structured how groups, in this case Minangkabau, understood and made sense of their reality before the arrival of Islam. Following Islam's introduction to Minangkabau, adat and Islam became intertwined. This contributed to a new cosmology. It did not disrupt Minangkabau's relationship to alam. Rather, it strengthened it because of the centrality of alam to both Minangkabau adat and Islam. Over time this has contributed to the production of knowledge that underscores the imperative to respect and care for our environment. In other words, it is exactly the kind of knowledge that Demos is referring to. However, by using the term "Indigenous" to refer to such knowledge I suggest that Demos and Todd add a level of specificity that becomes exclusionary. This exclusion is exemplified by what I have explained is the inapplicability of "Indigenous" to the artist and artworks examined in this study. Adat thus offers one example of a localized terminology that might diversify our understanding of the Anthropocene and contribute to calls to decolonize this term.

As art historian Mark Cheetham argues, art and art historians have more often highlighted breaks rather than connections between forms of expression related to the environment, from landscape to land art and eco art.<sup>59</sup> This, in turn, results in missed connections between forms that are only visible in hindsight.<sup>60</sup> In the context of our current geological epoch—the Anthropocene and its associated climate crises—such missed connections reveal new frames for approaching questions of sustainability, land management, and the dissemination of knowledge regarding our environment. Despite recent attention to the environment in writing on Indonesian art history and practice, the artists and art works considered in this study have not been positioned as productive sites for understanding how artists respond to or how art reflects ecological issues.<sup>61</sup> This absence can be attributed to the reality that the environment is seemingly absent and, in modern and contemporary landscape painting, the way in which the environment is depicted is inseparable from colonial ways of seeing. By reframing how we define "nature" in writing on art through an engagement with "alam," a term that not only refers to the physical realities of our natural world but also realms of perception and the universe that an artist is a part of, I address this absence and show that throughout history artists in and from Minangkabau have consistently engaged with and represented the environment in their work.

## Indonesian Art History and Minangkabau

The dominant narrative of modern and contemporary art in Indonesia has long been structured by the juxtaposition of two schools in Bandung and Yogyakarta. Today, these schools are known as the Faculty of Fine Art and Design at the Bandung Institute of Technology (Fakultas Seni Rupa & Design – Institut Teknologi Bandung, FSRD-ITB) and the Indonesian Institute of Art in Yogyakarta (Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta, ISI Yogyakarta). They were each established on the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Nancy Ellen Abrams and Joel. R. Primack, "Cosmology and 21st Century Culture," *Science* 293, no. 5536 (September 2001): 1769-1770.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Mark Cheetham, Landscape into Eco Art: Articulations of Nature Since the '60s (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018), 7.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> This scholarship has focused on the work of artists who are more aligned with activist practices. See Edwin Jurriëns, *The Art of Environmental Activism in Indonesia: Shifting Horizons* (London and New York: Routledge, 2023); Elly Kent, "Critical Recycling: Post-Consumer Waste as Medium and Meaning in Contemporary Indonesian Art," *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 4, no. 1 (2020): 73-98.

island of Java shortly after Indonesia's declared independence from the Dutch in 1945.<sup>62</sup> Each school became associated with a particular style of expression because of the character of the city in which each is located and the artists that were originally at the helm of each institution.

Once deemed the "Paris of Java," Bandung, located in the hills of West Java, was a haven for Europeans during the colonial era because of its high elevation and resultant climate. When a training school for drawing teachers was established there in 1947, it was led by Dutch artist Ries Mulder (1909-83). Having studied in the Netherlands and Paris, Mulder introduced his students to styles synonymous with western modernism, like abstraction and cubism. In the 1950s, the school earned the nickname "laboratory of the West" because of what was perceived as the tendency of students to create work that mimicked Mulder's characteristic geometric abstract style that is exemplified by his painting Church in Bandung (fig 1.15) The other school that dominates Indonesian art history was established in 1950 in Yogyakarta, a city located in an agrarian region of Central Java that was designated the temporary capital of the Republic during Indonesia's revolutionary struggle against the Dutch (1945-49). The art academy there was led by senior artists native to Indonesia who had played an active role in the revolution as leaders of sanggar (artist associations). As a result, Yogyakarta was identified from its inception with the production of work that paid heed to the realities of the people. For example, Sindudarsono Sudjojono's Di Depan Kelambu Terbuka (In Front of the Open Mosquito Net) (fig. I.16) is understood to depict a prostitute, a taboo subject when it was produced in 1939.

While the seemingly stark juxtaposition between stylistic interests at the schools in Bandung and Yogyakarta has dissipated over the last half century, and other art schools and art departments have been established across the archipelago (most notably, the Jakarta Art Institute), these cities, along with Jakarta, continue to be regarded as the centers of contemporary art production in Indonesia. This is because of the history and strength of the institutions in these cities and the density of artists who continue to contribute to the growth of galleries and other infrastructure to support their activities. It is well known that if someone is serious about either pursuing a degree in fine art or a career as a visual artist, it is in their best interest to find a way to these cities. Beyond this practical reality, the state of art history writing in and about Indonesia, and the region of Southeast Asia more generally, is also responsible for the continued dominance of Bandung and Yogyakarta in the discipline of Indonesian art history.

The production and dissemination of art history in Southeast Asia has until recently been limited due in large part to the almost complete absence of art history departments in universities across the region.<sup>63</sup> Instead of the academy, exhibitions have served as important sites for the production and interrogation of history. This reality presents limitations for probing existing historiographies and advancing new paradigms.<sup>64</sup> Practical realities like the space afforded to essays in exhibition catalogues and the resources that are available to plan exhibitions limit the depth, criticality, and nuance that a project can present. More seriously, factors such as politics and the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> The Department of Fine Art at the Bandung Institute of Technology grew out of a training school for drawing teachers that was established in 1947. Until 1950, this school was governed by the colonial Ministry of Culture. After 1950, its leadership changed, and its curriculum expanded. Established in 1950, at the outset Yogyakarta's art academy was known as ASRI (*Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia* – Indonesian Academy of Fine Art).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> David Teh (2020) asserts that "the production and dissemination of art history in Southeast Asia [has] lately become more consistent and more organized." This is due to a "regional scholarly community" and "art publishing industry" (357). The art publishing industry is centered in Singapore and has grown exponentially thanks to the efforts of the National Gallery Singapore, opened in 2015.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> For instance, see Seng Yu Jin, "The Primacy of Exhibitionary Discourses: Contemporaneity in Southeast Asian Art, 1992-2002," in *Intersecting Histories Contemporary Turns in Southeast Asian Art* (Singapore: School of Art, Design, and Media, Nanyang Technological University, 2012), 116-125.

market are inseparable from which artists are exhibited, where, and for what purposes. In other words, how a canon of Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art is shaped. When the Singapore Art Museum opened in 1996 followed by the National Gallery of Singapore in 2015 this city-state not only became the preeminent voice in the production of new exhibitionary discourse on Southeast Asian art history but also home to the largest collection of Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art anywhere in the world. As both Southeast Asia's smallest country in terms of land mass and its most powerful economically this raises questions about how the region's diversity is being represented. Since the inception of each institution a significant number of exhibitions have focused on the region to draw connections across what have already been established as national narratives.

The dominance of the nation-state in writing on Southeast Asian art history is not unique to this region but is a characteristic of much writing about non-Western modernism. This can be attributed to factors like colonial legacy and the influence that foreign artists had on the introduction and development of new styles and techniques associated with modernism as evidenced by the example of Mooi Indie painting in Indonesia. It can also be attributed to the part that nationalist movements played in advancing the agenda of artists native to Southeast Asia who were interested in defining a distinct national identity in and through their art and subsequently contributed to the development of new styles of expression. Further, on a practical level it is inseparable from the reality that when foreign scholars began to write on the work of modern artists in a site like Indonesia where existing historiographies of art did not exist or if they did were in a foreign language, it was necessary to first lay a foundation before interrogating more specific topics like gender, histories of violence, religion, and the environment. Scholarship published on Indonesian art history in the last decade especially has begun to interrogate these topics. The history of peripheral regions—where peripheral refers to a region's relationship to centralizing discourse and market activity— like West Sumatra have not been taken up with much rigor. The exception is Bali, which has always existed as an outlier within the national narrative of visual art because of scholarly/popular interest in the influence of Hinduism on the development of Balinese visual culture that, in turn, contributed to the emergence of a stream of modernism specific to this island. When geographic constructs take precedence in art historical writing on Southeast Asia, the dominance of the nation-state is typically called into question, or the utility of looking at the region (i.e., Southeast Asia) as a whole is the point of inquiry.<sup>65</sup>

An exception to this focus on nation-states or politicized ideas of regional cohesion in Indonesian art history is Roger Nelson's interest in "Theravadin Southeast Asia," which refers to the countries in Southeast Asia where Theravadin Buddhism is the dominant religion.<sup>66</sup> Rather than "preexisting political units," Nelson underscores the importance of drawing on "specific local contexts" and "regional knowledge systems" to better understand art and its reception across Southeast Asia.<sup>67</sup> Of course, this follows a long tradition of scholars writing outside of art history or

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> For writing on the dominance of the nation-state in Southeast Asian art historical discourse see David Teh, *Thai Art: Currencies of the Contemporary* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017). For contemporary writing on the possibilities of a regional art history see Vera Mey, "Unified Yet One? A Continued Plea for Regionalist Art History in Southeast Asia," *Mezosfera* (August 2020), <u>http://mezosfera.org/unified-yet-one-a-continued-plea-for-regionalist-art-history-in-southeast-asia/.</u>; Michelle Antoinette, *Reworlding Art History: Encounters with Contemporary Southeast Asian Art after 1990* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014). Each of these studies point to the influence of Singapore based art historian T.K. Sabapathy who beginning in the 1970s wrote extensively on the question of the region's relationship to the history of modern art. <sup>66</sup> Roger Nelson, "*Sangha* as Art Public? Questions on Buddhist Monks Engaging with Art in Theravada Southeast Asia," *World Art* 10, no. 2-3 (2020): 191-213.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Roger Nelson, "Sangha as Art Public? Questions on Buddhist Monks Engaging with Art in Theravada Southeast Asia," 198 – 199.

visual culture who have called attention to the effects of foreign influence on historical writing and, subsequently, our understanding of what is referred to as "Southeast Asia." "Southeast Asia" itself is a political construct that emerged during World War II and does not pay heed to the internal diversity that defines Southeast Asia.<sup>68</sup> J. C. Van Leur was one of the first scholars working in this region to critique the "Euro-centric" nature of our historical perspective. He asserted that greater significance must be given to the historical continuity of pre-colonial history in Southeast Asia.<sup>69</sup> John Smail argued for attention to "autonomous" histories or those written from a local perspective that place greater emphasis on local "thought worlds."<sup>70</sup> George Coedes, Robert Heine-Geldern, Oliver Wolters, and Stanley Tambiah all contributed to scholarship on the relationship of Southeast Asia to its neighbors, South and East Asia, drawing attention to the significance of local cosmologies for our understanding of intra-regional connections.<sup>71</sup> More recently, historian Thongchai Winichaukul, in his work on Thailand, has demonstrated how indigenous concepts of space were disrupted by modern technologies of mapping, and anthropologist James Scott has engaged with the term "Zomia," referring to the highlands of Southeast Asia populated by minority hill tribes, to consider how and why certain groups might choose to remain stateless.<sup>72</sup>

Within the frame proposed by these and other scholars that push against prescriptive boundaries like the nation-state, Minangkabau emerges as a site in which to rethink how Nelson's "specific local contexts" and "regional knowledge systems" inform the production, reception, and circulation of art objects. Specifically, the particularities of Minangkabau adat have shaped this group's world and influenced cultural expression over time. This is significant because Minangkabau has made a significant contribution to the history and development of global modern and contemporary art in the name of Indonesia. This is evidenced by the fact that the names of the artists associated with Minangkabau are already present in existing historiography. Minangkabau, moreover, has been integral in shaping a national culture.

Minangkabau has had a particularly strong influence on Indonesian historiography through other fields, including the literary arts and politics. This is despite the fact that Minangkabau constitutes only 2.73% of the nation's population.<sup>73</sup> This influence was particularly notable in the early twentieth century when such Minangkabau intellectuals as Muhammad Hatta (first vice-president), Sutan Sjahrir (socialist and first prime minister), and Tan Malaka (communist revolutionary philosopher) were central to nationalist and Islamic movements.<sup>74</sup> In the realm of visual art, this trend persists. Artists in and from Minangkabau have been recognized for their contributions at each stage of Indonesia's art history.<sup>75</sup> The outsized impact of Minangkabau is in contrast with the art history of the hundreds of other ethnic groups associated with islands beyond

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Donald K. Emmerson, "Southeast Asia': What's in a Name?," Journal of Southeast Asian Studies 15, no. 1 (1984): 1-21.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> J.C. Van Leuer, *Indonesian Trade and Society: Essays in Asian Social Economic History* (The Hague: W. Van Hoeve, 1955).
 <sup>70</sup> John Smail, "On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2, no. 2 (1961): 72-102.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> George Coedes, "Some Problems in the Ancient History of the Hinduized States of Southeast Asia," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 5, no. 2 (1964):1-14.; Robert Heine-Geldern, "Concepts of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 2, no.1 (November 1942): 15-30.; Oliver Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspective* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1999).; and Stanley Tambiah, "The Galactic Policy," in *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand Against a Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Thongchai Winichaukul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994).; James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> This is according to Indonesia's most recent census conducted in 2010.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Jeffrey Hadler, Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism, 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> I will address the question of periodization in chapter three.

Java, such as the Bugis of Sulawesi or the Banjar and Dayak of Kalimantan. Whereas one or two artists from any given group or region may have achieved national notoriety, no group of artists in the Indonesian periphery can position themselves in relation to a history of art like artists associated with Minangkabau in West Sumatra can. The activity of artists in Minangkabau uniquely dates to the late-colonial era.<sup>76</sup> Further, artists from only Minangkabau and Bali are commonly associated with their ethnic or regional origins in the critical reception of their work. This underscores the significance of looking at Minangkabau to expand our current understandings of modern and contemporary art history both nationally and regionally.

Some of Indonesia's most recognized contemporary artists are Minangkabau. For example, as described earlier in this introduction, in 2019 Handiwirman Saputra was invited to take part in the main exhibition of the Venice Biennale, the oldest and one of the most prestigious contemporary art biennials globally. In the mid to late twentieth century, some of Indonesia's most noted modernists were Minangkabau. Recently, Aminudin TH Siregar has referred to these artists, including Oesman Effendi (1919–85), Nashar (1928–94), Rusli (1916–2005), and Zaini (1926–77), as an "aesthetic school" (*mazhab estetik*) distinct from Bandung and Yogyakarta.<sup>77</sup> In the late colonial era, Wakidi, one of Indonesia's most well-regarded Mooi Indie landscape painters, lived and worked in Minangkabau. Despite the clear importance of Minangkabau to Indonesian art history, it was not until the contemporary era that curators, writers, and artists themselves paid heed to the Minangkabau origins of such artists. In their analysis of Minangkabau artists, Indonesian curators including Rizki A. Zaelani and Enin Supriyanto primarily focused on the use of figurative speech, or "way with words," that is inseparable from Minangkabau adat.<sup>78</sup> However, they did not focus on what I have shown is the intersection of such language and visual expression in Minangkabau nor did they highlight the centrality of alam to each.

#### Methodology and Limitations

This study is the product of an ongoing engagement with artists, art spaces, and art world observers, including gallerists, collectors, curators, writers, and art historians in Indonesia that began in 2011. While the research that informs this dissertation is based largely on a period of fieldwork from September 2016 to March 2018 and a follow-up trip in August 2019, this fieldwork would not have been possible if it were not for earlier trips that allowed me to build networks pertinent to the study of the work of visual artists associated with Minangkabau. My primary sites of analysis were Yogyakarta, West Sumatra, and Jakarta. I also took several shorter trips to Bali, Bandung, and Singapore.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Before settling on Minangkabau as the focus of this study, I considered other regions outside of Java that might serve as critical sites for expanding how we think about the history of art making in Indonesia. Having lived in Sulawesi for approximately one year from August 2008 – May 2009 and again from January – April 2010, my first inclination was to focus my research on the city of Makassar, which is the provincial capital of South Sulawesi. The dominant ethnic groups in this city include Bugis, Makassarese, Mandarese, and Torajan. However, due to factors including the infancy of art education in this city it was difficult to determine what an art world there might have looked like either prior to or after independence. Today, there are efforts to grow this city's art world as evidenced by the establishment of the Makassar Biennale in 2015.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Aminudin TH Siregar, "Mazhab Estetika: Seniman Minang di Seni Rupa Indonesia," *Sarasvati* (August 2015): 28-31.
 <sup>78</sup> See Rizki A. Zaelani, "Biasa: KElompok Seni Rupa 'Jendela', Kini," in *Biasa* (Jakarta: Nadi Gallery, August 2005), 6 12.; Enin Supriyanto, "Tanda-Tanda, Dari Jendela," in *Cilukba! (Peekaboo!): An Exhibition by Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela* (*The Jendela Art Group*) (Kuala Lumpur: Valentine Willie Fine Art, June 2007).

My initial interest in Indonesia's art world began when I was a master's student at Ohio University. From June 2011 to July 2012, I lived in Yogyakarta where I conducted research on the history and activities of socially and politically engaged artist collectives and alternative art spaces, with a particular focus on the significance of such institutions on the formation of youth culture in the post-Reformasi era (1998–onward). During this time, I also had the opportunity to work for Gajah Gallery, a Singapore-based commercial art gallery. I developed an interest in the activities of artists who position themselves outside of and even against the market, and broadened my understanding of the mechanisms that contribute to the production and circulation of art objects in Indonesia, specifically, and Southeast Asia, more broadly. Most significantly, my experience working at Gajah Gallery provided me a direct connection to Minangkabau that I worked to foster in the summer of 2014 and 2015, during shorter trips to Yogyakarta before starting research for this dissertation.

Since the late 1990s, Jasdeep Sandhu, the founder and owner of Gajah Gallery, has helped build the careers of Minangkabau-born contemporary artists and develop a discourse on the history and practice of art making in West Sumatra. Throughout this dissertation the market is an ongoing theme. This is because the growth of Southeast Asia's art market has had an undeniable impact on the development of a contemporary Minangkabau art world. Following a boom in Indonesian painting in 2008, certain Minangkabau-born artists established themselves amongst the highest grossing contemporary artists in Indonesia. This in turn, has made it possible for these artists to help build what I describe in chapter one is a physical Minangkabau arts ecosystem in Yogyakarta that includes art spaces and artist studios owned by figures like the members of the Jendela Art Group. Following the market validation of a significant number of Minangkabau-born contemporary artists, Jasdeep Sandhu led the charge to produce discourse on these artists. This has contributed to their critical reception. My relationship with Gajah Gallery remains integral to the networks that I have built with Minangkabau born contemporary artists.

Through my discussion of the Sakato Art Community and the Jendela Art Group in chapter one of this dissertation I will show that the Minangkabau diaspora in Yogyakarta is somewhat closed off to outsiders. Because of the experience that I had working with Gajah Gallery in 2012, I was not a complete outsider to the artists and groups that I sought to approach when I began research for this dissertation. In 2012, Gajah Gallery hired me to document the development of Jogja Art Lab. Managed by Gajah Gallery, Jogja Art Lab includes a gallery and foundry. It is also located on land owned by Yunizar, who is one of the members of the Jendela Art Group. The Jendela Art Group is comprised of six artists that are also part of the larger Sakato Art Community. Amongst the members of Sakato, the members of Jendela are highly respected. During my research for this dissertation, I observed the position of Jendela's members as advisors to the larger community of Sakato's members as well as their involvement in key activities like the organization of Sakato's annual exhibition Bakaba. Because of this my connection to Yunizar was significant because it meant that I already had a connection to one of Sakato's senior members. As part of the documentation process of Jogja Art Lab I had frequent conversations with Yunizar to better understand his practice and to learn about his collaboration with Gajah Gallery. The foundry that is part of Jogja Art Lab is used to cast Yunizar's bronze sculptures and assist in the production of works by other Minangkabau born artists. It is part of the contemporary Minangkabau art world's physical ecosystem in Yogyakarta.

Additionally, in summer 2014 I was introduced directly to the Sakato Art Community through Jeffrey Hadler. At this time, I was unfamiliar with the Sakato Art Community despite my connection to Yunizar. Jeff, whose research was focused on Minangkabau history and culture, urged me to visit the Sakato Art Community's annual exhibition *Bakaba*. Based on my interest in the history and activities of artist collectives in Yogyakarta, Jeff knew I would be intrigued by the size

and activities of the Sakato Art Community. In summer 2014, Jeff also connected me with Stefan Buana who is one of the founding members of Sakato and has a space in Yogyakarta called Barak Seni. Stefan frequently gathers young Minangkabau artists and other members of Yogyakarta's art world at Barak Seni, which is part of his home. Throughout research for this dissertation, whenever I mentioned Jeff's name I was immediately welcomed. Jeff is highly respected amongst Minangkabau in Java and in West Sumatra because of his knowledge of this region and group. Anyone who knew Jeff directly or knew of his research was eager to help me when they learned that I was his student.

Despite an initial level of access other factors presented obstacles in my study of the Minangkabau art world. Specifically, gender and the pronouns that I identify with (she/her/hers). This is exemplified by the most frequent question I receive when I share my research findings, namely "where are the women?" When people hear the moniker, "world's largest matrilineal Muslim society," they immediately assume that this means women are central to the group's activities. While this is to a certain extent true, because without the matrilinear structure, men could not merantau, or leave the family home and village, Minangkabau men rather than women are generally recognized for their contributions to Indonesian politics, history and, in the case of this study, the development of modern and contemporary art. I was almost always surrounded by men, especially in Yogyakarta.<sup>79</sup> Further, because I do not speak Minangkabau—although there are significant similarities with modern Indonesian because Indonesian and Minangkabau are derived from Malay—and I am not Muslim, I was faced with other barriers to entry.

Regardless of any initial limitations, throughout my research for this dissertation I consistently benefited from the generosity of the Sakato Art Community and, in time, was able to visit numerous artists' homes and studios. Specific members of the Sakato Art Community including its president at the time of my research Erizal AS as well as Anton Rais Makoginta who writes for and assists with the curation of Sakato's exhibitions helped to make important introductions that were integral to the success and outcomes of this study both in Yogyakarta and West Sumatra.

The city of Yogyakarta was both the starting point for my research and the central site of this study. This is because it is home to the Sakato Art Community and the Jendela Art Group each of which are cornerstones of the contemporary Minangkabau art world. The Sakato Art community was established in 1995 in Yogyakarta by Minangkabau born art students at ISI Yogyakarta. Today, it claims a membership between eighty and one hundred artists, which makes it the largest visual art community active in Indonesia. The Sakato Art Community acts as a home-away-from-home for Minangkabau migrant artists in Yogyakarta. It has also contributed to the coherence around Minangkabau in art because of its efforts to reorient its activities by engaging with Minangkabau history, culture, and adat especially in the themes that it chooses for its annual exhibition *Bakaba*. The members of Sakato overwhelmingly produce abstract and semi-abstract paintings. Amongst the members of Sakato are the members of the Jendela Art Group. Established in 1996, the Jendela Art Group and its members have contributed to the regional and international recognition of Minangkabau born artists. Like the members of Sakato, the members of Jendela have also been recognized for their abstract tendencies. Along with Yogyakarta, I also spent extended periods in West Sumatra and Jakarta.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> This does not mean that there are no Minangkabau-born female artists. In Yogyakarta, I spent a substantial amount of time with Fika Ria Santika (b. 1987) and Loli Rusman (b. 1979). Both women were born in West Sumatra and had recently migrated to Yogyakarta. In the case of Fika, she traveled to Yogyakarta with her husband, Anton Rais Makoginta, who is an active member of the Sakato Art Community, to pursue her master's at ISI Yogyakarta. In the case of Loli, she migrated to Yogyakarta to pursue a career as an artist, which would have otherwise been impossible in West Sumatra. In addition, Trien Iien (b. 1982), who was born in South Sumatra and now lives in Yogyakarta where she works in arts management was a critical interlocutor thanks to her relationship with the Sakato Art Community and knowledge of Sumatra.

The character of the art world in West Sumatra differs from that in Yogyakarta. In contrast to the dense artist communities in Yogyakarta, art spaces and the homes of artists in West Sumatra are spread out across the province, and events like exhibitions and discussions are held infrequently. A residency at the Indonesian Institute of Art in Padang Panjang allowed me to study the factors that drive young people in this region to pursue degrees in fine art and to observe the activities of faculty, most of whom were trained as artists in Yogyakarta. In West Sumatra, I also focused my research on the activities at the province's cultural center Taman Budaya. Located in Padang, the provincial capital of West Sumatra, Taman Budaya is home to the region's largest gallery and has facilities for artist studios. By spending time at Taman Budaya I was able to meet and talk with more artists. Time spent in West Sumatra was integral to the development of my understanding of Minangkabau adat and the practice of Islam in West Sumatra thanks to conversations with Mak Katik who is an expert on Minangkabau adat and Mas'oed Abidin Za Jabbar who is an ulama and respected religious leader in West Sumatra.

In Jakarta, my focus was on building an archive associated with "Jakarta's Minangkabau modernists," a phrase that I use to refer to four artists including Nashar, Oesman Effendi, Zaini, and Rusli who were all active in Jakarta in the post-independence period until their respective deaths. All these artists played a central part in the development of Jakarta's arts infrastructure specifically, institutions including Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM), the Jakarta Arts Council, and the Jakarta Art Institute from 1968. The Jakarta Arts Council located within the TIM complex has a substantial archive that includes newspaper clippings, catalogues, and artworks associated with these artists. This material was critical to construct a timeline associated with West Sumatra that has informed my analysis of the work of modern and contemporary artists associated with Minangkabau. Jakarta was also a practical base because it allowed me to move more efficiently between Yogyakarta and West Sumatra dependent on what kinds of activities were happening in each location.

Methodologically, my research builds on a longer tradition of Southeast Asian art history informed by ethnography and area studies training. Art historian of Vietnam Nora A. Taylor notes that the lack of archival traces in Southeast Asian art history makes interviews with living artists necessary to construct art histories of the region.<sup>80</sup> Following in this vein, I position myself as a participant observer as much as an art historian. As a participant observer, I spent a substantial amount of time at exhibition openings and discussions organized in correlation with specific exhibitions. During these events I observed interactions between members of the Sakato Art Community and spoke with as many individuals as possible to build relationships that made it possible to conduct individual interviews. Minangkabau-born artists tend to gather for events at the art spaces built by Jendela's members. One such space is Jumaldi Alfi's Sarang Complex, which also functions as Sakato's secretariat and meeting hall as well as Stefan Buana's Barak Seni, referenced previously. In West Sumatra because art spaces are fewer in number I relied on different types of spaces and events. I benefited immensely from my participation in two art tours held in West Sumatra in conjunction with the Tambo Arts Center annual exhibition. These tours were organized by members of Tambo and led by Ibu Melani Setiawan, an important patron of the visual arts from Jakarta. The goal of these tours was to attract collectors from Jakarta and Singapore who otherwise might not have been interested in traveling to West Sumatra for a single exhibition. During these tours I visited several historical and culturally relevant sites across West Sumatra, connected with artist communities and individual artists, and gained perspective on the world of international collectors. The interviews I conducted during this trip focused on the artist's biography as well as Minangkabau history and culture. While not directly connected to the activities of artists, in West

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> Nora A. Taylor, "The Southeast Asian Art Historian as Ethnographer?" Third Text 25, no. 4 (2011): 475-488.

Sumatra my ability to move throughout the province and enjoy other facets of Minangkabau like food and family life would not have been possible without the friendship of Novita Yulia Sukiman and Alberto Al. Both Novita and Alberto are graduates of Padang State University (*Universitas Negeri Padang*, UNP) where they studied art. Not only did they drive me from city to city in West Sumatra but also Novita invited me to her family home in Batusangkar. This city is in the Tanah Datar Regency, one of the three regencies that is part of the heartland or birthplace of Minangkabau that I will discuss in detail in chapter three. During these car rides we spoke about art, Minangkabau history and culture, and the activities of artists in West Sumatra.

Finally, writing about the work of artists in relation to their ethnic origins, I must acknowledge my position as an outsider with immense privilege as a scholar trained in and supported by institutions in the United States. The artists that I associate with Minangkabau are either members of one of the communities discussed, have a domicile in West Sumatra, or have been associated with Minangkabau by another Minangkabau-born artist or an art historian from Indonesia. I am fully aware that these associations can and should be challenged. Individual artists might describe their sense of identity differently, and ethnicity might not always be the preferred primary point of reference over formal analysis or other analytical frames. Nevertheless, as I set out in chapter one, in the last two decades ethnicity has emerged as a currency with significant weight in Indonesia's art world, in particular for artists from Minangkabau. This association with ethnicity as a key frame for the analysis of the work and activities of artists in Indonesia presents potential contrasts with discourse on race and visual representation in Euro-American art practice.

#### **Chapter Descriptions**

The three chapters in this dissertation lay out, in reverse chronological order, a history of art making associated with the work of modern and contemporary artists in and from Minangkabau from the late colonial era to the present. I begin in the present day to sketch the contemporary Minangkabau art world and underscore key factors that have contributed to a renewed attention to and greater coherence around Minangkabau identity in art. I then move backwards to underscore parallels that can be drawn between the work of modern and contemporary artists associated with Minangkabau. These parallels are rooted in an engagement of all the artists discussed in this dissertation with adat and alam or the idea that "nature acts as our teacher." This engagement with adat or alam and at times both, is evidenced either in the work of the artists discussed or in the relationships of these artists to one another.

Chapter 1 begins in the present. It focuses on two artists groups central to the development of a contemporary Minangkabau art world: the Sakato Art Community (est. 1995) and the Jendela Art Group (est. 1996), both of which call Yogyakarta home. In Indonesia, community has played an integral role in shaping modernist and contemporary art practices because of the lack of formal institutions for the study of art and infrastructure to support the activities of arts. Many of the communities in Indonesia that are recognized by art historians had clear social and political agendas. I situate Sakato and Jendela as part of this longer trajectory of collectivism. I also underscore how these groups diverge from dominant trends because of their connection to Minangkabau or their members' ethnic and regional origins. Sakato and Jendela were both established at a moment of significant change. Suharto's New Order regime came to an end in 1998 and the region's art market experienced a major boom in the mid-2000s. Each of these factors have contributed to Sakato and Jendela's reception and shaped the work and activities of these groups. Specifically, Jendela's members received attention for their production of seemingly apolitical works in the late-1990s and early-2000s that contributed to the perception that they were working against mainstream tendencies in Indonesian contemporary art at this time. Following the market recognition of these artists Indonesian curators needed to make their work intelligible to a regional audience. An attention to adat expressed through the use of figurative speech in Minangkabau became a key reference point for explaining the "adat berkarya" (customary practice of making) that defines the work of Jendela's members. The term adat berkarya was used by Indonesian curator Rizki A. Zaelani in the context of Jendela's fifth solo exhibition at Nadi Gallery, a commercial space in Jakarta to explain the unique language of expression that is understood as characteristic of the work of Jendela's members. Through an engagement with works part of this exhibition I consider both the impact of this adat berkarya and its relationship to different manifestations of alam in the work of Jendela's members. This sets the stage for my attention to Sakato's efforts to rebrand itself in 2009 in the context of increased competition brought on by the growth of Southeast Asia's art market. Specifically, I focus on Sakato's use of the Minangkabau notion of kaba (news, act of spreading or communicating information, form of traditional Minangkabau literature) as the title for its annual exhibition Bakaba. I conclude this chapter with a statement on how the process and current character of merantau has contributed to the growth of a contemporary Minangkabau art world and supported the emergence of additional groups in West Sumatra specifically the Tambo Arts Center (est. 2015).

Chapter 2 shifts backwards in time to the post-independence era (c. 1950–77). It gives attention to the work of four artists who I collectively describe as "Jakarta's Minangkabau modernists": Nashar, Oesman Effendi, Rusli, and Zaini. Scholars have previously positioned these artists as an "aesthetic school" (mazhab estetik), separate from Bandung and Yogyakarta because of the tendency of each artist to engage with a unique language of abstraction. To focus my discussion of these artists, Nashar takes center stage. This is because he was a prolific thinker and writer and thus left a more complete archive. He is also recognized for his formulation of a unique approach to art making defined by Three-Nons: without concept (non-prakonsepsi), a desired aesthetic (non-estetik), or the intention to use any technique (non-teknik) to achieve a certain outcome. A brief overview of Indonesia's political milieu ca. 1950-66 opens this chapter. This period has primarily been discussed in relation to its tragic endpoint, namely the events surrounding the elimination of Indonesia's communist party in 1965 and subsequent mass killing of suspected communist sympathizers from 1966 to 1968. It is notable that all of Jakarta's Minangkabau modernists advocated for artistic autonomy and after 1965, continued to produce art. This overview is followed by a consideration of Nashar's biography that describes his early artistic trajectory during the revolutionary era. It also situates him in relation to Angkatan 45 (the Generation of 1945), a reference that is used to describe writers who wrote their debut works during the revolutionary era. I show that Nashar's association with Angkatan 45 not only contributed to his support for artistic autonomy but also the formulation of his Three-Nons. In the second half of this chapter, I shift to Nashar's Three-Nons alongside a more explicit engagement with his relationship to Minangkabau. I examine specific incidents that contributed to the formulation of his Three-Nons. I also analyze several paintings created between 1964 and 1977 that demonstrate his move away from representational forms. I argue that central to these incidents and Nashar's move away from representational forms was an attention to alam and his embrace of the idea that "nature acts as our teacher." To demonstrate how these commitments impacted his compatriots I conclude this chapter by examining OE's stance on regional cultures that informed his return to West Sumatra in 1972 as well as his pronouncement that the "Minangkabauness" of his compatriots was visible in their work by 1976.

Chapter 3 focuses on what I describe as "landscape's legacies" in and amongst artists from West Sumatra. I open with reference to the work of Minangkabau-born contemporary artist Erizal AS (b. 1979). Part of the Minangkabau diaspora in Yogyakarta, Erizal returned to his village of birth during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 to study its landscapes. This return was rooted in Erizal's desire to engage critically with the legacy of the landscape painting genre in and amongst artists from West Sumatra. The landscapes that Erizal chose to depict are all located in the heartland of Minangkabau or the region that is considered the birthplace of Minangkabau. In this way, Erizal's return was not just to West Sumatra. Rather, it was to the very center of Alam Minangkabau. I introduce Erizal to set the stage for a reexamination of Wakidi's life and work and the history of landscape painting more generally in Indonesia. In West Sumatra and amongst Minangkabau-born artists Wakidi is looked to as the founding father of a modern art tradition. While he was not Minangkabau-born he spent almost the entirety of his life in West Sumatra where he was an educator. His affection for his adopted homeland that is demonstrated by factors like his ability to capture Alam Minangkabau has contributed to the perception that landscape painting is a kind of traditional heritage in Minangkabau. However, in nationalist historiography Wakidi has long been positioned as a proponent of the Mooi Indie or beautiful indies style. This style, which is characterized by idyllic depictions of Indonesia's countryside that diminish the realities of colonial exploitation and was popular amongst foreigners because of the nostalgic value it held, was critiqued by figures like revolutionary Sindudarsono Sudjojono in the late-colonial era. I show that Wakidi's position as a Mooi Indie art is inseparable from the work of anthropologist and art historian Claire Holt whose study, Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change published in 1967 was the first account of Indonesian modern art written in English in the post-independence period. By examining the significance of adat and alam to the development of landscape painting including Wakidi's in West Sumatra, the arguments in this chapter depart from earlier historicizations of landscape painting in Indonesia. Following an examination of Wakidi's life and work I return to a more focused discussion of Erizal's contemporary depictions of Alam Minangkabau. I conclude this chapter with a look at how landscape painting has become a cornerstone of the contemporary Minangkabau art world.

# Introduction

This chapter examines the history, reception, and activities of the Sakato Art Community (Sakato), which was established in 1995, and the Jendela Art Group (Jendela), which was established in 1996. Each of these groups is comprised of artists associated with Minangkabau and reflect a less common organizing principle in the history of community organization in Indonesian art history. Namely, the affiliation of a group's members with a specific ethnic group, like Minangkabau or region, such as West Sumatra. They are also central to the growth since the mid-1990s of what I identify as a contemporary Minangkabau art world. As I argue in this dissertation, this world mirrors what is imagined as Alam Minangkabau (constituted by a static homeland and its diaspora). It is shaped by factors including Minangkabau history, language, and cultural obligation.

Both Sakato and Jendela were formed in the mid-1990s by art students from Minangkabau who were studying at Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI Yogyakarta). Having migrated in pursuit of education, the members of these groups are part of the Minangkabau diaspora in Java. A small number of aspiring artists had the opportunity to travel from West Sumatra to pursue their education in the 1950s.<sup>81</sup> By the 1990s, several Minangkabau-born artists had established themselves in Yogyakarta.<sup>82</sup> In the early 1990s, this trend shifted as recent graduates of institutions like West Sumatra's Fine Arts High School (Sekolah Menengah Seni Rupa, SMSR), began to travel to Yogyakarta in "droves," ultimately choosing to stay in this city, which is recognized as one of Indonesia's most significant centers of contemporary art.<sup>83</sup>

Yogyakarta's position as a center of contemporary art is rooted in this city's contribution to the history of modern art, the density of artists, and the character of this city's arts infrastructure. An academy for the study of fine art was established in 1950 at the end of Indonesia's revolutionary struggle and remains integral to the activities of contemporary artists in Yogyakarta.<sup>84</sup> Today, this academy is known as ISI Yogyakarta. Like the members of Sakato and Jendela it is often the case that graduates of ISI Yogyakarta chose to stay in this city because of the opportunities it affords. This is thanks to factors like the number of art spaces in Yogyakarta as well as the recognition of annual events like the Yogyakarta Biennale and Art Jog that draw significant crowds including a general public, collectors, curators, and art historians. Here, Art Jog refers to an art fair that was established in 2008 and will be discussed later in this chapter. In contrast to a region like West

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> In 1976, Minangkabau-born artist Oesman Effendi delivered a speech at Taman Ismail Marzuki in Jakarta titled, "A Painting Movement in West Sumatra." In this speech he noted that in 1952 following the organization of an exhibition of artworks from the "center" (i.e., Java) organized in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra's regional government sent several artists to Yogyakarta to study at ASRI. The first group of artists to receive scholarships included Anwarsjam, Dahlan, and Hasan Basri. After this a second group of artists was sent including Arby Samah, Jalaludi, and Husni.
<sup>82</sup> Artists including Risman Marah (b. 1951) – recognized as Indonesia's first contemporary photographer, the late Kasman KS (1954 – 2009) – recognized for his monumental sculptures, Syaiful Adnan (b. 1957) – recognized for the development of a contemporary form of calligraphy, and Syahrizal Koto (b. 1960) – considered one of Indonesia's senior abstract sculptors all traveled to Yogyakarta in the 1970s to pursue their studies at ISI Yogyakarta. After graduating they stayed in this city and established themselves as artists and in the case of Risman Marah, educators.
<sup>83</sup> Interview with Stefan Buana and Zulfa Hendra, March 25, 2017, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Yogyakarta's art academy was known as Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia (Indonesian Academy of Fine Art, ASRI) when it opened in 1950. ASRI along with Akademi Musik Indonesia (Indonesian Academy of Music, AMI) and Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia (Indonesian Academy of Dance, ASTI) were combined in 1984 and became ISI Yogyakarta.

Sumatra where art galleries and art events like exhibitions are limited and a market for the sale of art is largely nonexistent, in Yogyakarta specifically and Java generally, it is possible for an aspiring artist to imagine gaining recognition for their creative pursuits and subsequently, making a living from their vocation as an artist.

When Sakato and Jendela were formed they were in good company. There was a marked proliferation of artist groups, communities, and collectives that correlated with factors like increased admission at ISI Yogyakarta in the mid-1990s. Whereas previous angkatan (referring to a class of students admitted in the same year) generally consisted of around twenty students in a specific discipline like painting (seni lukis), in the mid-1990s this number increased by 8-10 percent contributing to a greater density of art students in Yogyakarta.<sup>85</sup> Being part of a group made it possible for an individual to display their work in what was an increasingly saturated and subsequently competitive environment while also providing a sense of belonging for the members of a group. For many groups after one or two exhibitions, without a clear organizational focus, the members would disband. This was the fate of two other Minangkabau collectives including the Semoet Group (Kelompok Semoet) and the Genta Group (Kelompok Genta). Sakato and Jendela are thus, noteworthy because of their longevity. Both still exist and have contributed to what I argue is a greater coherence around Minangkabau identity in contemporary visual arts. This coherence is evidenced by factors including explicit connections drawn by non-Minangkabau curators and art writers between the work and activities of artists associated with Minangkabau and their Minangkabau identity as well as efforts by Sakato to rebrand this group with clear reference to Minangkabau history and culture. In both instances, adat or customary norms is central to an understanding of how these connections have been drawn and established by non-Minangkabau and Minangkabau alike. Specifically reference to language use in Minangkabau along with traditional forms of oral expression have become integral to a connection with Minangkabau in the work and activities of artists associated with the Minangkabau diaspora in Java. This contrasts with earlier moments throughout the twentieth century during which factors like the relationship of West Sumatra to the central government and state policies quelled the desire and ability of artists in Indonesia generally and Minangkabau specifically to comment on their ethnic and regional origins.

In the last decade, an association with Minangkabau has taken on new import for aspiring and established artists. On the one hand, this can be attributed to the critical reception and global art market recognition of certain Minangkabau-born contemporary artists like the members of Jendela. On the other hand, it can be attributed to the shift in state policies that followed the end of Suharto's New Order regime in 1998. Specifically, centralization policies intended to better control the state impacted the expression of regional identities like Minangkabau.

Indonesia is spread across 17,500 islands and is home to approximately 300 distinct ethnic groups. The state motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), is both an expression of what makes Indonesia such a unique state and a tool of state control. The manipulation of difference was especially pronounced during Suharto's thirty-two-year New Order regime (1966–98). While it was possible to express regional identities during this time, a very specific idea about the appropriate form of regional "culture" developed.<sup>86</sup> As expert on Indonesian cultural policy Tod Jones rightly points out, "Taman Mini," or the Beautiful Indonesia in Miniature Park (*Taman Mini Indonesian Indah*)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> Art historian Amanda Rath (2011) notes, "the concept of *angkatan* is also significant in terms of artistic and literary production, similar (but not identical) to a sort of historicism that would divide art history into a linear succession of periods and movements" (61-62).; Mamanoor, "Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela GARDA (SeGAR di daDA)," in *Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela Membuka Kemungkinan* (KSRJ: Yogyakarta, 2000), 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> For more on how regional cultures were shaped to fit a particular mold acceptable to the central government during the New Order see Greg Acciaioli, "Culture as Art: From Practice to Spectacle in Indonesia," *Canberra Anthropology* 8, no. 12 (1985): 148-172.

that opened in Jakarta in 1975, is exemplary of efforts to homogenize the nation's cultures.<sup>87</sup> Modeled like a theme park, Taman Mini offers visitors the opportunity to experience objects representative of each province and its associated culture, ranging from traditional architecture to textiles and musical instruments. These objects contributed to the "aestheticization" of adat and are associated with its tangible expression. In this way, Taman Mini was, as anthropologist Shelly Errington puts it, "not a 'model of' Indonesia, ... but a 'model for' Indonesia," whereby expressions of local (i.e., regional and ethnic) identity were generally equated with tradition.<sup>88</sup> How local culture was expressed and promoted began to shift in 1998 in response to the end of the New Order and the start of a period known as Reformasi (reform) that allowed for decentralization as a means to provide greater autonomy to local governments.<sup>89</sup> The result has been what scholar of Indonesian politics Marcus Mietzner calls a "renaissance of long-suppressed local identities."<sup>90</sup> This "renaissance" is especially salient in relation to the history of Minangkabau. Association with Minangkabau had not been a point of pride for many people since the early 1960s, when the PRRI rebellion was suppressed by Indonesia's central government. In fact, many describe a trend during the second half of the twentieth century whereby generations of children were given more Javanesesounding names as a strategy to avoid association with their Minangkabau origins.<sup>91</sup>

Throughout history, efforts to control and homogenize Indonesia have been met with resistance from different groups and regions, including Minangkabau. Following Indonesia's declared independence in 1945, significant debate ensued regarding appropriate structures of governance. Political unification generated fears for those outside of Java, where the capital of Jakarta is located, and two-thirds of the population are Javanese. Local elites and businessmen outside of Java feared the effects of Javanization, fiscal exploitation, and the loss of power and tradition.<sup>92</sup> Amid general enthusiasm for independence and the idea of a unitary nation-state, throughout the 1950s struggles arose that were rooted in the desire to maintain some form of regional autonomy.<sup>93</sup> A lack of political representation in the central government from then Central Sumatra (an area that encompassed present-day West Sumatra, Riau, Jambi, and the Riau Islands) led

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Tod Jones, *Culture, Power, and Authoritarianism in the Indonesian State: Cultural Policy across the Twentieth Century to the Reform Era* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>88</sup> Shelly Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 222.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> Of note were the abolishment of certain laws imposed in the 1970s, whereby the central government was able to appoint regional officials and reorganize certain forms of village administration both of which, led to the dominance of Javanese and Sundanese officials across the archipelago, where "Javanese" and "Sundanese" refer to the nation's two largest ethnic groups.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> Marcus Mietzner, "Indonesia's Decentralization: the Rise of Local Identities and the Survival of the Nation-State," in *Regional Dynamics in a Decentralized Indonesia*, ed. Hal Hill (Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2014), 52.; To date, much has been write about the effects of decentralization or the "resurgence of long-suppressed local identities" on the election of local officials who hail from the sites they seek to represent as well as the resurgence of adat law as a means to claim rights to indigenous lands. Little to nothing has been written about the impact of this on popular culture or forms of expression like fine art.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> I heard reference to this phenomenon from various interlocutors throughout my fieldwork. Unfortunately, I did not make note of who exactly stated this. However, based on the number of times I remember hearing reference to this phenomenon both from individuals who identify with Minangkabau as well as colleagues who identify with other ethnic groups, I believe it is a kind of popular perception amongst those familiar with Minangkabau and this period in history.
<sup>92</sup> Gusti Asnan et al., "Nation, region, and the Ambiguities of Modernity in Indonesia in the 1950s," in *Indonesia Transitions*, ed. Henk Schulte Nordholt (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2006), 115.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> Besides the rebellion in Central Sumatra known as PRRI other notable regional rebellions include Permesta in Sulawesi and the Darul Islam movement spread across Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi. For more on Permesta see Barbara S. Harvey, *Permesta: Half a Rebellion* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Publications, 1977). For more on Darul Islam see C. van Dijk, *Rebellion Under the Banner of Islam: The Darul Islam in Indonesia* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1981).

to the declaration in February 1958 of a revolutionary government known as Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia (Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia), which came to be known by its acronym, PRRI.<sup>94</sup> The central government in Jakarta responded with military force and quickly took control of the region's major cities.<sup>95</sup> Because there was relatively widespread support from Central Sumatra's general populace, this did not mean complete defeat. Instead, the PRRI conflict ensued until 1961, with guerilla forces hiding in the region's jungles.<sup>96</sup> Ultimately, the central government prevailed, which resulted in stigma associated with Minangkabau. After decades of resistance against the Dutch colonial system coupled with the role played by numerous Minangkabau in the nationalist struggle and establishment of an independent Republic, the defeat of PRRI "led to 'a kind of mental breakdown' among the Minangkabau."<sup>97</sup> In recent decades, the legacy left by these events has begun to dissipate, especially since the enactment of decentralization policies in the late 1990s and early 2000s that, together with the effects of globalization, have made the "local" more valuable than ever. This is especially salient for creative producers because attention to aspects of local identity makes it possible to differentiate oneself or a community in an increasingly competitive art world be it locally in Yogyakarta, nationally in Indonesia, or regionally in Southeast Asia.

To demonstrate how an attention to and engagement with Minangkabau identity has both impacted the reception of work by the members of Jendela and shaped the activities of Sakato this chapter will be divided into four parts. I will first discuss the formation of Sakato and Jendela, highlighting the factors that motivated each group's members to form a community. To contextualize my discussion of Sakato and Jendela, I will demonstrate the centrality of collective organization to the development of Indonesian art since the late-colonial era when Indonesia's first sangar (artist association) was established in 1938. I will show that many of the artist groups and communities in Indonesia that have been recognized by art historians were formed with clear political or social agendas. This contrasts with Sakato and Jendela as well as another arts community based in Yogyakarta known as Sanggar Dewata that is comprised of artists from Bali. By looking at certain parallels between Sakato, Jendela, and Sanggar Dewata I will not only underscore the rarity of ethnicity or regional identity as the basis for community in Indonesian art history but also, show how factors like the history of visual culture in Bali versus Minangkabau sets the history of these groups apart. The second section of the chapter examines the reception of Jendela both in critical discourse and the market. Specifically, it considers how the dominance of art that directly confronted social issues and politics in the 1990s contrasted with the work of Jendela's members. It also looks at how a market boom in the mid-2000s contributed to the popularity of Jendela and its members. This will serve as a foundation to consider how and with what effects the Minangkabau identity of Jendela's members came to play a key part in analyses of their work. In the third section, I explain how Sakato's annual exhibition, Bakaba, became a forum through which to promote

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> Historian Kevin W. Fogg (2015) details how in the 1950s things ranging from the implementation of Guided Democracy in 1957 that gave then President Sukarno greater power over the central government to the reconfiguration of military command in Sumatra contributed to the declaration of PRRI due to frustration and anger amongst officials and military leaders in Central Sumatra (167 – 168).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>95</sup> Kevin W. Fogg, "Evaluating the PRRI Rebellion as a West Sumatran Peasant Movement," *TINGKAP* XI, no. 2 (2015): 168.

 $<sup>^{96}</sup>$  Fogg attributes the success of guerilla fighters to prior experience with rebellions that led to a knowledge of the jungles like the Padri Wars (1821–1837), an Anti-Tax Rebellion (1908), and a communist uprising (1927) (161 – 165). Further, he details how popular support was evidenced by realities including enlistment practices and aid (food and supplies) that helped to sustain the rebel forces hiding in the region's jungles (168).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Audrey Kahin, Rebellion to Integration: West Sumatra and the Indonesian Polity 1926 – 1998 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000), 229.

Minangkabau identity from 2008 onwards. This moment—2008—is notable because it not only aligns with the effects of the decentralization of Indonesia's national government that contributed to a renewed interest in regional identities following the end of Suharto's New Order in 1998 but also is associated with a boom in Indonesian art in the Southeast Asia's regional art market. This chapter concludes with an examination of how Sakato, Jendela, and the Tambo Arts Center, a third group based in West Sumatra that was formed in 2016, have contributed to the growth of a contemporary Minangkabau art world.

# Community and the History of Indonesian Art

Since the late-colonial era collective organization has played an integral part in the development of Indonesian art and culture. In 1938, Indonesia's first artist association, or sanggar, was established by revolutionary artists Sindudarsono Sudjojono (1913–85) and Agus Djava (1913–94).<sup>98</sup> The goal of this sanggar, known as Persagi (Persatuan Ahli-Ahli Gambar Indonesia, Foundation of Indonesian Drawing Experts) was to train artists, organize exhibitions, and promote the ideals of nationalism at a time when artists native to the then Dutch East Indies were not permitted to study or show their work alongside their foreign counterparts.<sup>99</sup> Before the establishment of formal art academies in the post-independence period, sanggar were central to the development of Indonesian art. Organized around one or several senior artists, sanggar were places where artists, studied, worked, and often slept. They were also sites where nationalist thought was disseminated and artists gathered to contribute to the revolutionary cause. Since the establishment of Persagi, innumerable sanggar, groups (kelompok), communities (komunitas), and collectives (kolektif) have contributed to the development of Indonesian modern and contemporary art. In short, the motivation to form such groups did not dissipate with the establishment of art academies in the post-independence period that afforded aspiring artists the opportunity to study art in a formal institution. Instead, factors like periods of political tumult inspired the formation of new groups.

Like Persagi, many of the groups that art historians have recognized for their contribution to the development of Indonesia's art history were formed during periods of significant change or conflict. Most of these groups also had a clear political or social agenda. For instance, during the revolutionary era, members of sanggar like SIM (Seniman Indonesia Muda, Young Indonesian Artists) and Pelukis Rakyat (People's Painters), played a part in documenting the revolution by joining guerilla fighters on the front lines.<sup>100</sup> After the recognition of Indonesia's independence and amid debates concerning what direction the development of Indonesian culture should take, Lekra

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 197.; The term sanggar comes from Old Javanese (*Jawa Kuno*) meaning a place to "meditate." Persagi is overwhelmingly referred to as the first sanggar, however, Matthew Cox (2015) points to two sanggar that preceded Persagi including *Kumpulan Raden Saleh*, established in 1923 and *Kelompok Lima Bandung*, established in 1938 (2). For more on the history of sanggar and collectivism in Indonesian art see Nurani Juliastuti, "Sanggar as Model for Practicing Art in Communal Life," <u>http://sekolah.kunci.or.id/?p=375&lang=en</u>, accessed January 2019. This paper was originally published as part of the *Made in Commons* exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam in November 2013.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> Helena Spanjaard, Artists and their Inspiration: A Guide through Indonesian Art History (1930-2015) (Volendam: LM Publishers, 2016), 29-40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> SIM was established in 1946 in Madiun by Sudjojono. It later moved to Yogyakarta, then to Solo, and finally back to Madiun (Holt 201). Many of SIM's members were former members of Persagi (Spanjaard 36). In 1947, Pelukis Rakyat was established in Yogyakarta by Affandi and Hendra Gunawan after they decided to split with Sudjojono. In his memoir Nashar describes the events leading to this split explaining that Affandi and Hendra Gunawan did not agree with the way Sudjojono divided a subsidy amongst SIM's members by grouping artists into different classes based on seniority and skill (38).

(Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, Institute for the People's Culture) was established in 1950. This organization was associated with Indonesia's communist party. It supported the spread of the party's ideals and political agenda with slogans like "politics is the commander" (*politik adalah panglima*) and by encouraging its artist-members to go to and learn from the people (*turun ke bawah*).<sup>101</sup> In the lead up to and aftermath of the end of Suharto's New Order regime in 1998, such groups as Apotik Komik, Taring Padi, and ruangrupa were formed. These groups are notable because they were contemporaneous with Sakato and Jendela and as the following description demonstrates, they are also characterized by markedly different agendas than either Sakato or Jendela.

Apotik Komik was established by a group of students at ISI Yogyakarta in 1997 with a primary focus to promote public art.<sup>102</sup> Today, street art is abundant in Yogyakarta. In the late-1990s this was not the case. Apotik Komik was interested in bringing art to a wider public and promoting the production of murals in this city. They were also inspired by Yogyakarta's history as a center of the nation's revolutionary struggle and what during the revolution was the work of artists like Basuki Resobowo (1916–99) to promote nationalism and Indonesia's independence through the production of murals in Yogyakarta.<sup>103</sup>

Taring Padi was established in 1998 by activist artists who were students at ISI Yogyakarta. This group was inspired by what they saw as the imperative to continue the fight of the student movement that had contributed to the fall of Suharto's New Order regime.<sup>104</sup> Until now, Taring Padi is known for their production of wood block prints with clear messages focused on themes like democracy and human rights as well as their work with marginalized communities.

Finally, ruangrupa was formed by an interdisciplinary group of creative practitioners in Jakarta in 2000 with a desire to find creative solutions to make art sustainable and accessible in a large metropolis like Jakarta.<sup>105</sup> This is exemplified by their development of an arts ecosystem in Jakarta known as Gudskul as well as the curatorial theme "Lumbung" that they proposed and implemented at documenta 15.<sup>106</sup> Where Gudskul refers to a physical space managed by three collectives in Jakarta including ruangrupa that is focused on how to promote resource sharing and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Lekra will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two.; This is not the only sanggar or artist group of note in the post-independence period. Because of its association with the communist party, however, it receives the most attention in contrast to organizations such as Gabungan Pelukis Indonesia (Association of Indonesian Painters, GPI) in Jakarta. Because Nashar was associated with GPI this group will be discussed in chapter two.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> For more on the history of Apotik Komik see Nano Warsono, *Jogja Agropop: Negosiasi Identitas Kultural Dalam Seni Visual* (Yogyakarta: Langgeng Art Foundation, 2011); Bambang Witjaksono, "Fenomena Mural di Yogyakarta Tahun 2002 – 2003" (MA thesis, Institut Teknologi Bandung, 2005).; and Syamsul Barry, *Jalan Seni Jalanan Yogyakarta* (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Studium, 2008).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> Khairuddin Hori, "Towards Meaningful Art, Apotik Komik Paints Yogyakarta," in *Negotiating Home: History and Nation: Two Decades of Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia 1991-2011,* ed. Iola Lenzi (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2011), 71-76.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> For more on Taring Padi's history and activities see Annie Sloman et al., *Seni Membongkar Tirani* (Yogyakarta: Lumbung Press, 2011). For more on the legacy of Apotik Komik and Taring Padi in Yogyakarta see Katherine L. Bruhn, "Art and Youth Culture of the Post-Reformasi Era: Social Engagement, Alternative Expression, and the Public Sphere in Yogyakarta" (MA thesis, Ohio University, 2013).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>105</sup> For more on the history of ruangrupa and how this group positions itself see Nuraini Juliastuti, "Ruangrupa: A Conversation on Horizontal Organization," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry* 30 (September 2012): 118-125.; David Teh, "Who Cares A Lot? Ruangrupa as Curatorship," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry* 30 (September 2012): 108-117.; and Thomas J. Berghuis, "ruangrupa: What Cound be Art to Come?" *Third Text* 25, no. 4 (2011): 395-407.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> For more on ruangrupa's role in and concept for documenta 15 see Samanth Subramanian, "A Radical Collective Takes Over One of the World's Biggest Art Shows," *New York Times,* June 9, 2022,

https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/09/magazine/ruangrupa-documenta.html#:~:text=New%20York%20Times-.A%20Radical%20Collective%20Takes%20Over%20One%20of%20the%20World%27s%20Biggest,which%20unfolds %20over%20100%20days%3F.

develop an alternative model of education through art, documenta 15 is a quinquennial exhibition that takes place in Kassel, Germany.<sup>107</sup> When ruangrupa was selected as artistic director in 2019 of documenta 15 (held in 2022), it marked the first time that a collective as well as individuals from Asia were tasked with the conceptualization of this event that is looked to by international art world observers as a barometer of the most cutting edge ideas in global contemporary art.<sup>108</sup> Ruangrupa's proposed curatorial theme "Lumbung," which refers to rice storage barns found in villages throughout Southeast Asia, was proposed as a model for this exhibition that was focused, like Gudskul, on how art and the activities of artist collectives can reveal insights concerning areas like resource sharing and relationality.

Looked at together, Apotik Komik, Taring Padi, and ruangrupa, exemplify what for many artist groups and collectives in Indonesia since the late-colonial era has been a central concern with social engagement through art and collective organization as well as work focused on political and social issues. When Sakato and Jendela were formed they were not inspired by such concerns or foci. Instead, they looked to a group that was also formed on ethnic and regional lines known as Sanggar Dewata (Workshop of the Gods).

Established in 1970, Sanggar Dewata was organized by art students and one teacher at ISI Yogyakarta, all of whom hailed from Bali. Like the members of Sakato and Jendela, the members of Sanggar Dewata were *pendatang* (newcomers) to Yogyakarta.<sup>109</sup> Wayan Sika (1949–2020), one of Sanggar Dewata's founding members, has explained that when Sanggar Dewata was formed, its members had an explicit interest in maintaining a "Balinese spirit" in their work while also creating something new, by which he meant, rejecting what was the dominance of tourist art in Bali in the 1970s that idealized Bali and did not demonstrate modernist advances.<sup>110</sup> As art historian and expert on Balinese art Adrian Vickers writes of such tourist art referenced by Wayan Sika, it belonged to the category of Mooi Indie expression marked by the depiction of "happy natives in rice fields" and had dominated Bali's art world from the 1950s.<sup>111</sup> This was due to factors like the influence of foreign artists living in the area of Ubud, in particular Dutch artist Rudolf Bonnet (1895–1978), as well as the interests of the nation's first president Sukarno.<sup>112</sup> To counter the dominance of idyllic depictions of Bali that did not pay heed to Balinese traditions and the island's unique history of visual expression the members of Sanggar Dewata chose to incorporate references to traditional Balinese aesthetics and themes in their work. As Vickers elaborates, this can be seen through reference to forms like wayang (shadow puppet) and Kamasan style art, engagement with Balinese

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> Along with ruangrupa, Gudskul was established by Serrum and Grafis Huru Hara. For more on Gudskul see Chloe Chu, "Bad Students, Gudskuls," *Art Asia Pacific* (May 2022), <u>https://artasiapacific.com/issue/bad-students-gudskuls</u>.
 <sup>108</sup> Ruangrupa's selection as artistic director of documenta 15 ended in controversy due to antisemitism charges levied against Taring Padi. For more on this controversy see, Wulan Dirgantoro and Elly Kent, "We Need to Tallk! Art, Offence, and Politics in Documenta 15," *New Mandala* (June 29, 2022), <u>https://www.newmandala.org/we-need-to-talk-art-offence-and-politics-in-documenta-15/.</u>; Minh Nguyen, "Friendship and Antagonism: Documenta 15," *Art in America* (August 2, 2022), <u>https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/aia-reviews/documenta-15-review-lumbung-ruangrupa-1234635632/.
</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> The founding members of Sanggar Dewata were I Nyoman Gunarsa, I Wayan Sika, I Made Wianta, Pande Gede Supada, and I Nyoman Arsana. In her thesis on Sanggar Dewata, Usha Das (2017) notes that an additional founding member, I Wayan Arsana Guna is noted in some accounts of the collective.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> Interview with I Wayan Sika, March 1, 2017, Ubud, Bali, Indonesia.; Here Vickers reference is drawn from Claire Holt's seminal study of Indonesian art published in 1967, in which she pointed to the decline of Balinese artistic innovation in the 1950s in comparison to an earlier trip she took there in the 1930s. This history is notable because it both disregards the work of artists in the 1930s whose work was not derived from the influence of foreign artists in Bali but rather, demonstrated modernist advances.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>111</sup> Adrian Vickers, "Balinese Art versus Global Art," *Jurnal Kajian Bali* 1, no. 2 (October 2011), 37.
 <sup>112</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

religious and spiritual beliefs like the *niskala* and Hindu yantras, and the adaptation of traditional techniques and styles.<sup>113</sup>

Bali is unique because it remains a Hindu enclave amidst Indonesia's majority Muslim population. Throughout history this has contributed to the development of visual culture markedly different than that in Minangkabau, a group and region that is synonymous with Islam. A classic painting tradition is traced to the village of Kamasan in Klungkung, southeast Bali. Vickers describes this style of painting that is observable on the ceiling of the Kerta Ghosa Pavillion in Klungkung (fig **1.1**) as the "high point of tradition" and the "epitome of the classical form of Balinese painting."<sup>114</sup> This pavilion is part of the Dewa Agung complex and was used as a court as indicated by its name that translates as "Hall of Justice."<sup>115</sup> The characters depicted on its ceiling are drawn from the Hindu Mahabharata epic and portray a "religious scheme that explains the workings of the divine and the role of superhuman power in life."<sup>116</sup> Along with the subject matter and its direct correlation with religious and cultural practices in Bali, as painting done in the Kamasan style continues to be used in temple festivals, Kamasan style painting also reflects the elements of Balinese aesthetics.<sup>117</sup> These include: proportion, color, linear and figurative aspects of a work, narrative, and iconography that according to Vickers can be traced through traditional to modern and contemporary art.<sup>118</sup>It is informative to consider the existence and history of Kamasan style painting as a traditional heritage in Bali because it not only has and continues to inform the work of visual artists associated with Bali but also, predates the introduction of Mooi Indie style painting. This contrasts directly with Minangkabau where earlier forms of visual culture like the motifs found in traditional textiles and carvings used to decorate the facade of rumah gadang, have historically been thought of as somehow less significant to West Sumatra's art history than the introduction of oil painting. This is reflected by Handiwirman Saputra's statement referenced in this dissertation's introduction.

Over time, Sanggar Dewata's membership has grown exponentially. Today, like Sakato for Minangkabau artists, Sanggar Dewata acts as a kind of home-away-from-home for Balinese artists in Yogyakarta as well as a link between Yogyakarta and Bali for artists in each site.<sup>119</sup> Further, like the members of Jendela and Sakato who achieved notoriety outside of their homeland, for Balinese artists interested in advancing their artistic careers by producing art that diverges from the "tourist image" of Bali, leaving Bali and traveling to Indonesia's art centers (i.e., Yogyakarta and Bandung) has been imperative.<sup>120</sup> It is therefore not surprising that art historians often draw parallels between Sanggar Dewata and Sakato. Even more so, because outside of these and several other smaller groups defined by their members' association with either Bali or Minangkabau, ethnicity and regional origins has not been a dominant organizing principle for communities, collectives, and groups in the history of Indonesian art.<sup>121</sup> This comparison between Sanggar Dewata and Sakato, however, misses a key difference between these groups as well as Jendela. Whereas Sanggar Dewata artists were able to draw on a clearly defined history of visual expression specific to Bali when this

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> Adrian Vickers, "Balinese Art versus Global Art," 51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>114</sup> Adrian Vickers, Balinese Art: Paintings and Drawings of Bali 1800 - 2010 (Tuttle Publishing, 2011), 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> Dewa Agung was the title used for the kings of Klungkung. The term "dewa" means God.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> Adrian Vickers, Balinese Art: Paintings and Drawings of Bali 1800 - 2010, 81.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> This link between Yogyakarta and Bali is exemplified by what in the early-2000s was the establishment of "SDI-Bali," a second SDI organization based in on the island of Bali. This group was founded by alumni of ISI-Yogyakarta after they returned to Bali from Java.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>120</sup> Adrian Vickers, "Balinese Art versus Global Art," 43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> Another community defined by its members Balinese origins is Galang Kangin established around 1998. For more on this group see Wayan Setem Hardiman (ed.), *Becoming: 20 Tahun Galang Kangin* (Arti Foundation, 2018).

group was formed, as demonstrated by my engagement with Kamasan style painting, the founding members of Sakato and Jendela did not think about themselves in relation to art history in West Sumatra.<sup>122</sup> Second, whereas Sanggar Dewata's founding members were explicitly interested in engaging with their Balinese identity, at the outset neither Sakato nor Jendela sought to be defined by its Minangkabau origins. Nevertheless, the ethnic origins of Jendela artists became a primary point of reference for curators and critics who sought to articulate what drives this group to work against dominant currents and to understand what ties the work of this group's members together.

# The Sakato Art Community

Initially, the idea to form Sakato grew out of the simple reality that many of the group's original members lived together in *kontrakan* (rented rooms or houses). This allowed them to gather "*setiap sore dan malam*" (every afternoon and evening) to discuss topics ranging from their classes at ISI Yogyakarta to their experiences back home in West Sumatra.<sup>123</sup> At the outset, Sakato was conceived of by a group of approximately twenty art students in Yogyakarta from Minangkabau who called their association Kelompok Sakato (the Sakato Group). Exactly who was responsible for the initial impetus to form Sakato remains up for debate. Since 1995, the name of Sakato has changed several times. In 2000, Kelompok Sakato became Sanggar Sekato and in 2009, Sanggar Sakato became Kelompok Seni Sakato (the Sakato Art Group). Whereas the term "kelompok" is a descriptor for an affable bond between friends, the term sanggar, with its deep historical connotations, points to a more serious engagement with processes of creative production and mentorship. As I will explain later in this chapter, the decision to revert to "kelompok" in 2009, reflects Sakato's desire at that time to rebrand its activities to not only make the group more legible to a broader international audience but also, distinct through a more explicit engagement with Minangkabau history and culture.

Since it was established, one of Sakato's primary activities has been organizing exhibitions that feature the work of its members. The group's first exhibition was held in October 1995 in Yogyakarta and included the work of fifty-five artist members as well as several friends and lecturers from ISI who were not associated with Minangkabau. The fact that non-Minangkabau artists and even more so, non-Sakato members were included in this group's first exhibition reflects what at that time was the more open character of this group. Today, participation in Sakato's annual exhibition is limited to Sakato members and results from a selection process that is led by certain members of Sakato including the group's elected leader (*ketua*) and established artists like the members of Jendela.

In Sakato's first exhibition most of the works displayed were paintings, followed by several three-dimensional forms, and exactly three photographic works.<sup>124</sup> Amongst these, there was a diversity of subject matter and thematic interests. Whereas paintings like Denny Snod Susanto's *Menunggu Kematian* (Waiting for Death) (**fig 1.2**) reflected what in the 1980s was the growth of a surrealist stream in Yogyakarta, others that featured Arabic calligraphy (of which there were many) like Syaiful Adnan's *Yang Maha Esa* (The One and Only) (**fig 1.3**) pointed to the religious affiliation of Sakato's members, who as Minangkabau identify as Muslim.<sup>125</sup> The dominance of Arabic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> To understand the longer trajectory of visual expression specific to Bali see Adrian Vickers, *Balinese Art: Paintings and Drawings of Bali 1800 – 2010* (North Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 2012).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> Interview with Stefan Buana and Zulfa Hendra, March 25, 2017, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>124</sup> The catalogue produced by Sakato for this exhibition includes photographs of each artist's work. Thanks to this it serves as an important archive of what the work of this group's earliest members looked like.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> For more on the development of surrealism in Yogyakarta in the 1980s see Martinus Dwi Marianto, "Surrealist Painting in Yogyakarta," (PhD diss., University of Wollongong, 1995).

calligraphy like Adnan's also reflected what in the 1980s was the popularity of Islamic art that was supported by a Islamic resurgence in Indonesia at this time.<sup>126</sup> None of the works reflected what in Indonesia in the early-1990s was growing interest in forms and subjects that would be associated with the term *"seni kontemporer"* (contemporary art), like installation and performance. Nor did the works displayed contain explicit statements regarding the increasingly contentious political climate that marked the last years of Suharto's New Order regime. Until now, the work of Sakato's members is defined by such diversity of theme and subject matter and a preference for painting generally done in a large-scale format.

In the catalogue produced by Sakato for their inaugural exhibition Yogyakarta-based curator Suwarno Wisetrotomo, himself a Javanese, emphasized the fact that rather than functioning as a vehicle to "unite ideas or viewpoints to advance or mobilize a movement" Sakato functioned to raise the group "spirit" through a "collective sentiment."<sup>127</sup> This statement reflects what since its establishment has been one of Sakato's primary goals. Namely, to support and encourage one another to produce high quality art. In an essay for Sakato's group exhibition in 2009, Wisetrotomo elaborated on his assessment of Sakato when he wrote that like the family home, Sakato acts as an "emotional center that ties together the extended family." Since its establishment Sakato has not only helped to promote the individuality and success of its members who tend to return home no matter how far they wander but also has contributed to the regeneration of new families that remain genealogically attached to Sakato, like Jendela which was formed just one year after Sakato.<sup>128</sup> Suwarno's reference to a "family home," a sentiment that is shared by members of Sakato, is a nod to the centrality of the matrifocal longhouse (rumah gadang) in Minangkabau society. It moreover references the act of merantau (outward migration) that has contributed to not only the size and strength of the Minangkabau diaspora but also their sustained relationship to home.

Sakato's membership is fluid. It is not clear exactly how many individuals are part of this group. Estimates range from eighty to one hundred. Nevertheless, regardless of the precise number of artist members such estimates position Sakato as one of if not the largest visual art community active in Indonesia, rivaled only by Sanggar Dewata. Certain members explained that after migrating to Yogyakarta they acquainted themselves with active members of Sakato before they felt confident to join the group's activities such as its annual exhibition.<sup>129</sup> This description points to a process whereby building a network and establishing relationships results in familiarity and a sense of connection. In principle Sakato is an open community in that anyone can join. However, anecdotes like this one as well as the reality that almost all Sakato's members are Minangkabau-born points to the somewhat closed off character of this group.<sup>130</sup>

Along with its annual exhibition, Sakato's regular activities include semi-annual meetings, smaller exhibitions featuring several of the group's members, and organized discussions. The structure of the semi-annual meetings as well as the position of a *ketua* (group leader) are notable

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>126</sup> For more on Islamic art in Indonesia including its development in the 1980s see Virginia Hooker, "God is Beautiful and Loves Beauty': Aesthetics and Ethics in Islam-Inspired Art," in *Living Art: Indonesian Artists Engage Politics, Society and History,* eds. Elly Kent, Virginia Hooker, and Caroline Turner (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2023), 145-174.; Anissa Rahadiningtyas, "The Neglected Dimension—Calligraphy, Abstraction, and Performativity in Modern and Contemporary Indonesia," in *The Neglected Dimension* (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2023), 14-34.; Kenneth M. George, "Ethics, Iconoclasm, and Qur'anic Art in Indonesia," *Cultural Anthropology* 24, no. 4 (2009): 589-621.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> Suwarno Wisetrotomo, "Atas Nama Sentimen Kampung: Catatan untuk Pameran Seni Rupa 'Sakato," in *Sakato* (Yogyakarta: Taman Budaya, October 1995), 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> Suwarno Wisetrotomo, "SAKATO: Agar Rumah Keluarga Ini Tak Kesepian," in *BAKABA* (Yogyakarta: Sakato Art Community, 2010), 54-59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>129</sup> Conversation with Fika Ria Santika and Anton Rais Makoginta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>130</sup> During the research for this dissertation, I met one artist who was not Minangkabau-born, Iabadiou Piko. He was born in Prabumulih, South Sumatra.

because of their relationship to Minangkabau adat. These semi-annual meetings are referred to as MUBES or Musyawarah Besar (Big Deliberation). Musyawarah, from Arabic, refers to a form of democratic consensus building. This term and process are not specific to Minangkabau but rather, are associated with foundational philosophical theories of the Indonesian state. This is reflected in the state motto Pancasila that is defined by five principles including "democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberation amongst representatives" (kerakyataan yang dipimpin oleh hikmat kebijaksanaan dalam permusyawaratan/perwaklian) or "musyawarah mufakat" for short as articulated by Sukarno in his pronouncement of Pancasila. For Sakato, MUBES meetings are an opportunity to evaluate the group's activities and elect leadership positions like the group's ketua. A more direct relationship to Minangkabau adat is reflected in how members of Sakato view the community's leadership and organizational structure. Sakato's former president Erizal AS whose work will be discussed at length in chapter three, explained that Sakato's organizational structure is reflective of the Minangkabau philosophy "didauluan salangkah, ditinggikan sarantiang." This proverb can be translated as "take a step first, raised by a branch." It refers to the distance between a leader and his people and portrays the idea that a leader should remain close to those that they represent. In this way, the leader remains an integral part of the community as he represents the interests of the whole.

Sakato's current strength and visibility is evidenced by its physical ecosystem in Yogyakarta. This ecosystem which includes galleries and artist studios makes it easier and quicker for Minangkabau migrants to Yogyakarta from West Sumatra to find employment, exhibit one's work, and forge connections with local and international gallerists, curators, and art writers than was the case for previous generations like the founding members of Sakato and Jendela. In the last two decades, Jendela members Jumaldi Alfi, Handiwirman Saputra, and Yunizar have all built art spaces and studios in Yogyakarta. In 2008, Jumaldi Alfi began to build his SaRanG complex that now includes at least two gallery spaces, facilities to host an artist in residence, and a building that is used as Sakato's secretariat. Gatherings including Sakato's MUBES, smaller scale exhibitions, and other meetings relevant to Sakato are held at this secretariat. Because of its function as Sakato's central meeting space, Sakato's secretariat can be compared to a *Balai Adat* (Adat Hall) in Minangkabau.

Traditionally, Balai Adat functioned as spaces where village chiefs (*penghulu*) and other community leaders gathered to deliberate and resolve issues associated with adat and village affairs. Like a town hall, Balai Adat were built at the center of a *nagarai*, the term used to refer to semi-autonomous village units in Minangkabau, near the nagarai's mosque. Structurally, Balai Adat resemble the Minangkabau rumah gadang with its *gonjong* or horn-shaped roof (**fig I.9**). However, in contrast to rumah gadang that have divided interiors or smaller rooms, Balai Adat are characterized by an open floor plan that reflects the multi-use character of such spaces that are designed for communal functions. This floor plan is demonstrated by a photograph (**fig 1.4**) of Sakato's secretariat that depicts an exhibition held in May 2017 during Jogja Art Weeks.<sup>131</sup> Another photograph (**fig 1.5**) that depicts a meeting with Sakato's members in February 2017 to discuss the goals of my research underscores the multiuse character of Balai Adat. By providing this space free of charge to Sakato and its members Jumaldi Alfi embodies the idea in Minangkabau that a leader or someone with a position should consider the interests of the wider community that they are a part.

Adjacent to the SaRanG complex is Handiwirman Saputra's sudio called BKDP or *Balai Keseharian dan Pemajangan* (referring to a gathering space *(balai)* that is open or used daily *(keseharian)* for the display or exhibition *(pemajangan)* of what is produced there). While BKDP is primarily

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> Jogja Art Weeks was established in 2015 by Heri Pemad Art Management, the entity that manages Art Jog. The primary purpose and function of JAW is to publish a calendar of all the events held across Yogyakarta and in surrounding areas in correlation with Art Jog.

Handiwirman's personal workspace, it is also used for exhibitions and is an important site of employment for artists from Minangkabau who work as Handiwirman's assistants. Approximately one mile from SaRanG and BKDP is Yogya Art Lab. This space is owned by Yunizar and was developed in collaboration with Singapore based Gajah Gallery beginning in 2011. Yogya Art Lab includes a gallery and a foundry where Yunizar's three-dimensional art works are created. In addition to these, there are numerous other spaces owned by members of Sakato like Gusmen Heriadi's Ruang Dalam (Inside Room) and Stefan Buana's Barak Seni (Art Barracks), both of which function as meeting and exhibition spaces in the artist's home. All the spaces mentioned are situated near one another, a mere 1 - 3 miles or 5 - 10 minutes by motorbike. This contributes to the urban fabric of Sakato and the feeling that Minangkabau artists part of the diaspora in Yogyakarta are part of a world in and of itself that is defined by its connection to Minangkabau. The fact that much of this infrastructure is owned by Jendela can be traced back to this group's notoriety beginning in the early-2000s that resulted in the market success of its members.

#### The Jendela Art Group

The Jendela Art Group was established in 1996 shortly after the formation of Sakato. Its founding members—Handiwirman Saputra (b. 1973), Jumaldi Alfi (b. 1973), Muhammad Irfan (b. 1972), Rudi Mantofani (b. 1973), Yunizar (b. 1971), and Yusra Martunus (b. 1973)—were also members of Sakato.<sup>132</sup> Their desire to form Jendela arose out of what Jumaldi Alfi describes as their shared work ethic and desire for a more disciplined environment than that which Sakato offered due to the size of Sakato and its more fluid membership.<sup>133</sup>

Members of Jendela additionally cite inferiority as a central motivation to this group's formation. As Jumaldi Alfi recalls, when art students from West Sumatra arrived in Yogyakarta and gained admission to ISI, landscape painting was typically the only genre of art with which they were familiar. Those who had studied at SMSR had been forced to master this style as students; many of their teachers had studied under Mooi Indie landscape painter Wakidi (1889–1979) and his students. For others, landscape painting was the only or most common type of art that they had encountered in family or neighbors' homes, or the few exhibitions held at Taman Budaya, Padang's statesponsored cultural center.<sup>134</sup> The transfer of information concerning new developments in the visual arts outside of West Sumatra remained limited in the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>135</sup> In consequence, art students from West Sumatra were surprised by the complete disinterest in landscape painting amongst lecturers and fellow students in Yogyakarta. Members of Jendela as well as Sakato felt like what they knew or were most skilled at was outdated and thus inferior. For the members of Jendela

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>132</sup> Muhammad Irfan exhibited with Jendela up until the group's fourth show in 2002.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>133</sup> Interview with Jumaldi Alfi, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, February 6, 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>134</sup> Taman Budaya, translated literally as "cultural park," are cultural centers that were established by the Ministry of Education and Culture beginning in 1978. As cultural theorist Tod Jones (2013) notes, from 1978 to 1994, twenty-four Taman Budaya were established in provinces across the archipelago (205). These sites generally include some kind of performance space as well as an exhibition hall. In conversation with Yunizar he described having little access to art as a high school student at SMSR Padang. He recalled two exhibitions held at Padang's Taman Budaya including a solo exhibition of Minangkabau-born Arby Samah (1933 – 2017) who is known for his abstract sculptures and an exhibition of paintings by a Swiss artist who was living in West Sumatra. Rather than fine art, Yunizar received more influence from his general surroundings; objects like wedding invitations, souvenirs, and velvet paintings like those sold near Jam Gadang in Bukittinggi that generally depict landscape scenes.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> In 1955, writer A.A. Navis published an article titled "On Painting in Central Sumatra" (*Tentang Senilukis di Sumatera Tengah*) in which he expressed a similar reality. Namely, the fact that by 1955 information regarding developments in painting were slow to reach painters in what was then recognized as Central Sumatra, an area that included present-day West Sumatra. As a result, landscape painting continued to dominate this region's art world.

forming a smaller group empowered them to shape a safe space to differentiate themselves from their ISI peers and develop their individual practices. In this context, the name "Jendela," which can be translated as "window" was a significant statement on how the members of this group viewed their position in relation to what was happening in Yogyakarta as well as Indonesia's wider art world. A window allowed them to look outward on the developments and trends that characterized the activities of their peers as well as mainstream tendencies in Indonesian art. In contrast to a door that would have allowed others in, the window made it possible to shut out external influences and remain committed as individuals to the development of their own aesthetic interests.<sup>136</sup>

Like Sakato, the work of Jendela's members has always been characterized by a diversity of thematic interests. Neither Sakato nor Jendela produces works collectively, as is the case with groups such as Apotik Komik or Taring Padi. Instead, Jendela like Sakato functions as a structure that supports the autonomy of its members. As students at ISI Yogyakarta Jendela's members were in different disciplines. Jumaldi Alfi and Yunizar studied painting (*seni lukis*). Handiwirman Saputra and Muhammad Irfan studied craft (*seni kriya*). And Rudi Mantofani and Yusra Martunus studied sculpture (*seni patung*). Each artist's training not only informs their current practice but also contributed to the overall development of the group's members that cite the importance of learning from one another's experiences.<sup>137</sup>

Jendela's members organized their first exhibition in October 1997 in Yogyakarta. This exhibition was held at Purna Budaya, a large two-story building located on the campus of Gadjah Mada University. It did not have a curatorial theme. Instead, it was simply titled "Fine Art Exhibition of the Jendela Art Group" (*Pameran Seni Rupa Kelopmok Jendela*). The works displayed were organized by medium. The building's first floor was reserved for three-dimensional works made from materials like wood and various metals (**fig 1.6**), while the second floor was used to display paintings that were predominantly non-representational (**fig 1.7**). In an essay written for the catalogue that accompanied this exhibition, Soewardi, a lecturer at ISI Yogyakarta focused on what he saw as an engagement with the "general format of Fine Art" in the work of all Jendela's members stating:

The Jendela Art Group remains true to convention in the sense that they engage with a general format of Fine Art, like a stretched canvas bounded by a frame or a form made from wood and metal as well as cement, all of which are tilled in accordance with the material's character. Maybe this is nothing special, but what is interesting about this group is that the idea expressed by a work corresponds with the material used to express it. They speak about their own inner worlds, an attitude that is somewhat against the current, whereby social issues and even politics are the main concern of artists today (especially those that are young and academic).<sup>138</sup>

Soewardi's comments are notable for two reasons. First, until now attention is frequently paid by curators and art writers to the technical expertise of each of Jendela's members that is demonstrated by their commitment to specific forms like painting or sculpture as well as the refinement or technical expertise that marks theirs works. Second, since Jendela's inaugural exhibition the perception that this group's members are more interested in their "own inner worlds" than "social issues and even politics" has persisted and colored analyses of their work. Two works that were part

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> Rizki A. Zaelani, "Biasa: Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela', Kini," in Biasa (Jakarta: Nadi Gallery, 2005), 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> Ibid., 6.; Grace Samboh, "Spektrum Praktik Estetik Jendela," in *The Window of Jendela* (Magelang: OHD Museum, 2013), 56.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>138</sup> Soewardi, "Sebuah Ungkapan Dunia Personal," in Pameran Seni Rupa Jendela (KSRJ: Yogyakarta, 1997).

of Jendela's inaugural exhibition shed light on each of these perspectives including Yusra Martunus' sculpture *Mencari Ketenangan* (Looking for Calm) (**fig 1.8**) and Jumaldi Alfi's painting *Love* (**fig 1.9**). In addition to these works, I also consider a later work by each artist to demonstrate continuity in their process as well as material and thematic interests.

For Jendela's inaugural exhibition most of Yusra's works were created from large pieces of wood. Mencari Ketenangan was one such work. It stands approximately six feet tall and at first glance, mimics a pole. There are no representational forms carved into the sculpture or additions made to the piece of wood that forms its body besides the pedestal that the main form sits atop. As Yusra explained, when he began to create this piece, he was struck by the multitoned grain of the wood's surface that in turn, became the primary focus of the work. Yusra wanted to bring this element of the material to the fore to emphasize what he felt was a kind of harmony exuded by the natural intertwining of light and dark. He did not further accentuate this harmony by trying to achieve a smooth finish by carefully carving or sanding the wood's surface as he was taught to do as a student in the sculpture (seni patung) department at ISI. Instead, Yusra used a chainsaw to achieve a rough, textured surface that disrupts what might otherwise have been an encounter with the harmony exuded by the inherent quality of this piece of wood. This juxtaposition between harmony and discord is central to the work's message that is further enforced by the sculpture's title, "Searching for Calm." This search for calm might be read in relation to Yusra's interest in the materiality of the wood. Its tone, grain, and the effect of Yusra's manipulation of each with a chainsaw. In other words, as a reflection of Soewardi's analysis that ideas expressed in the work of Jendela's members directly correlated with the materials used. In another vein, it might also be read as a subtle commentary on Indonesia's history that was marked by violence and oppression throughout the second half of the twentieth century and a desire by 1997 for calm.

Across Yusra's repertoire it is possible to track a similar strategy. Namely, the manipulation of materials to assert an idea. This is exemplified by another sculpture created in 1999 titled *99107* (**fig 1.10**). This sculpture is composed of two parts. The largest component made from barbed wire is a sphere that rests on an iron mount. Together these forms mimic a globe. However, unlike a globe that is usually a solid structure because of the material that Yusra's globe is made from it is possible to peer into and through it. This creates the impression that the globe is like a cage. Its threatening exterior further exacerbates a sense of confinement. Like barbed wire at the top of a fence that warns trespassers not to enter, either moving in or out of Yusra's cage would result in bodily harm. Unlike *Mencari Ketenangan*, the title of this work, *99107* does not provide the viewer with additional information that might aide their analysis. The use of numbers in serial is a common feature of Yusra's work as well as other members of Jendela. However, like *Mencari Ketenangan*, the physical materials that comprise *99107* are central to the impression were all realities of the New Order that persisted after 1998 when this work was created, just one year after the fall of Suharto's fall from power.

Along with three-dimensional objects like *Mencari Ketenangan*, Jendela's inaugural exhibition included a substantial number of two-dimensional pieces including Jumaldi Alfi's painting *Love* (fig 1.9). This piece that is approximately three by three feet plays with meaning and intent in the relationship between the painting's title and its color palette and imagery. The result is a chaotic, almost sinister scene that does not correlate with or meet the expectation of the feeling or experience of love. Set against a stark black backdrop, an object reminiscent of a bright red apple in the bottom left corner of the painting, a misshapen heart above it, and a yellow hyena-like creature with bulbous eyes in the bottom right corner all pop out at the viewer. Details emerge the longer one stares at the composition. At its center are two barely discernible faces; behind the heart, a horizontal crescent appears almost like wings; and, from the apple, lines shoot upward to pass

through the letter "S." There is no clear focus. Rather, Alfi's composition calls to mind the subconscious clouded by a dizzying array of thoughts or references. If we consider a photograph (**fig 1.11**) of Alfi standing next to two additional paintings that he created for Jendela's inaugural exhibition we see how he employed this strategy again. Each painting is comprised of abstract and semi-abstract forms almost haphazardly strewn across each canvas. The most obvious forms include an apple labelled as such in the painting at the top of the photograph along with faces in white that pop out at the viewer in the painting at the bottom of the photograph. Across Alfi's repertoire a common characteristic is a sense of immediacy achieved by drawing, marking, and scribbling his canvases as is the case with all three of the paintings examined here. The picture plane or the canvas is his playground and in later works, a point of departure for the message he seeks to portray. This is demonstrated by his blackboard series that includes paintings like *Ever Ending Lesson "Possible Realistic Art"* (**fig 1.12**).

Nearly eight by six feet, *Ever Ending Lesson "Possible Realistic Art"* is a blackboard or at least a photo-realist depiction of one. Across the blackboard or canvas, Alfi has written quotes from Western artists including Keith Edmier, Peter Doig, and Thomas Hirschhorn. Each of these quotes ruminates on the meaning and potential of art and in the case of the final quote from Hirschhorn directly addresses the relationship of politics to art. In his blackboard series Jumaldi Alfi challenges the viewer's perception not unlike Rene Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* or "This is Not a Pipe." By creating a photo-realist illusion with paint on canvas, coupled with text that challenges the viewer to consider the nature and function of the object presented, Alfi challenges his viewer to consider what a painting is and even more so, what his object is. Is it a painting or is it a blackboard? Here again, we can refer to Soewardi's assessment that the material of the work itself is key to the message portrayed that in this case is the canvas or picture plane. And while many of Alfi's works like *Love* do have an undeniable connection to his "inner world" in that they are the manifestation of his subconscious, they are not without a relationship to the external worlds that the artist is a part.

Jendela's inaugural exhibition established the fact that each of this group's members has a distinct approach and style of art making. As such, neither Mencari Ketenangan and Love nor the later work of these artists can be seen as representative of the group as a whole. Nevertheless, these works demonstrate ways in which different members of Jendela engage with material or the specific medium of a work like painting to achieve their message thus, supporting Soewardi's assessment. At the same time, however, these works also underscore the fact that Jendela's art world reception that glorified the "inner world" of the individual artist was far from how Jendela artists thought and continue to think about their work. This misalignment is significant because after their inaugural exhibition the response that Jendela received from critics was mixed. Following Jendela's third exhibition, held in 2000 at Purna Budaya in Yogyakarta and later at Taman Ismail Marzuki in Jakarta, art critic Agus Dermawan T. called the members of Jendela "lazy" and their work "obscene." He charged that it should not be called contemporary because it did not reference the context in which it is produced.<sup>139</sup> Dermawan's insistence that contemporary art should engage directly with social issues and politics reflects what in the 1990s and early-2000s was the dominance of art that directly confronted these areas. This resulted in the perception that Jendela's members were working against mainstream tendencies in Indonesian contemporary art. It also led to a connection drawn between their outsider status as Minangkabau to clarify how and why they created works that appeared apolitical.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>139</sup> Agus Dermawan T., "Seni Rupa Yang 'Mengutang' dan 'Bermuatan," Harian Kompas (June 11, 2000), 18.

### Jendela's Reception: Politics, the Market, and Minangkabau

As students in the 1990s, the founding members of Sakato and Jendela were part of a generation that came of age during a time of significant change both at home and abroad. By the end of the decade, Indonesia's economy was in turmoil. After thirty-two years as president, Suharto had been ousted from power following the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and the demands of a student movement.<sup>140</sup> The effects of post-1989 globalization, such as the imperative to imagine a post-Cold War world and greater accessibility to and for artists living in regions across the Global South, increasingly impacted the circulation and reception of art around the world. In the Asia-Pacific region, this new reality was marked by an increase in major international exhibitions as well as the launching of new projects and grants by state-funded art centers and museums in Australia and Japan, specifically.<sup>141</sup> These forums not only increased the exposure of Indonesian art abroad but also provided a platform for works that were explicit statements on things like state violence and politics. Such works were often too contentious to display at home because of fear of retribution from the state. In these forums artists including F.X. Harsono (b. 1949), Dadang Christanto (b. 1957), and Heri Dono (b. 1960) rose to prominence.<sup>142</sup>

An exhibition held in Yogyakarta at Cemeti Art House in April 1996 titled *Slot in the Box* is informative because the art displayed represents mainstream tendencies in art making in Indonesia in the 1990s and early-2000s.<sup>143</sup> Because *Slot in the Box* was held six months prior to Jendela's inaugural exhibition, rather than the work of the artists mentioned above, I see this exhibition as a noteworthy

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>140</sup> For more on the student movement in Indonesia that aided in the fall of Suharto's New Order regime see Edward Aspinall, *Opposing Suharto: Compromise, Resistance, and Regime Change in Indonesia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) and Doreen Lee, *Activist Archives: Youth Culture and the Political Past in Indonesia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
<sup>141</sup> These exhibitions include the Asia Pacific Triennial, organized by the Queensland Art Gallery beginning in 1993; exhibitions organized in Japan by the Fukuoka Art Museum/Fukuoka Asian Art Museum and the Japan Foundation; and the *Traditions/Tensions* exhibition in 1996, sponsored by the Asia Society, New York. For a concise description of these events, see Agung Hujatnikajennong, "Indonesian Contemporary Art in the International Arena: Representation and its Changes," in *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, eds. Hans Belting et al. (Karlsruhe: ZKM Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, 2011), 332-337.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>142</sup> Art historian Leonor Veiga (2017) points out while it is not incorrect to categorize much of the art produced in 1990s Indonesia as "political" it is imperative to also consider how this art engaged with tradition and even more so, the legacy of an earlier avant-garde movement known as Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru (the New Art Movement) that was initiated in 1975 by a group of young artists to protest to what they perceived as outdated modes of expression. The work of GSRB's members engaged forms such as ready-mades, installation, and performance as one of the movement's goals, stated in a five-point manifesto (1979), was to free artistic expression from forms such as painting, sculpture, and drawing (xix). To create art that would replace what they termed seni rupa lama (old art) the members of GSRB sought to bring art closer to life. This would be done by creating art that was more "alive" and focused on social issues rather than, esoteric matters and by breaking down boundaries between "High Fine Art," dependent on value systems associated with Western art, and local traditions. In the 1990s, there was a renewed interest in the platform advanced by GSRB in work of artists like Arahmaiani (b. 1961), Dadang Christanto, Heri Dono, and Krisna Murti (b. 1957) whose careers blossomed in the 1980s. Veiga refers to these artists as part of a 'Third avant-garde.' As Veiga explains, while the Southeast Asian avant-garde's program had significant similarities to earlier avant-gardes in Europe and North America like, "the use of the ready-made, the recontextualizing of objects and strategies of appropriation following the collection of fragments" its novelty was "the introduction of local emblems and symbols into the realm of art...done not only to denote identity and origin (in order to differentiate from western mainstream art), but equally to reject the locally promoted attitude to traditions that reduced vibrant cultures into frozen invented traditions" (99). In contrast to certain works identic with GSRB that deliver an immediate shock, Veiga argues that the work of Third Avant-garde artists, such as Heri Dono produced more subtle messages that were not merely about identity but also commented on the sociopolitical context of this period.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>143</sup> Cemeti Art House was established in 1988. Throughout the 1990s, it served as a critical link between artists in Indonesia and international curators who were part of major exhibitions organized in Japan, Australia, the United States and elsewhere.

comparison. It elicited significant attention because of the directness of the works on display and the fact that it brought together artists from all three of Indonesia's art centers including Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Jakarta. Slot in the Box featured the work of twenty-three artists. It did not include the work of any of Jendela's members. This does not appear to have been deliberate but rather, can be read in relation to the types of works that were included in *Slot in the Box* and the fact that the members of Jendela were not interested in the styles and forms of expression that characterized this exhibition. Slot in the Box was conceived of as a response to the corrupt nature of the election process in Indonesia. As stated in an essay in the exhibition catalogue by ISI Yogyakarta lecturer Dwi Marianto, the concerns of the exhibition reflected "the current conditions where people [were] becoming more and more strained with fear and mental terror as a result of the various types of violence which form[ed] the reality of daily life."<sup>144</sup> In this context, neither an "aesthetics of beauty" nor an "aesthetics of pleasure" could underline the works.<sup>145</sup> This sentiment is notable because it parallels Dermawan's distaste for the work of Jendela's members. Dermawan believed that Jendela's members focused more on formal aspects to achieve pleasing aesthetic compositions. As a result, it was disconnected from reality. This sentiment also suggests that art with a connection to social issues and politics, to be effective, had to abandon formal interests and instead rely on the shock value of a work.

An installation photograph of *Slot in the Box* (fig 1.13) indicates that many of the pieces displayed in the exhibition were comprised of found objects, including a watercooler, the bottom half of a mannequin, and a length of hair. The use of readymade materials and the dominance of three-dimensional forms reflected the growing interest in modes of expression like installation, and subjects that came to be associated with the term *seni kontemporer* (contemporary art).<sup>146</sup> One work by Harry Wahyu, titled Telinga (Ear) (fig 1.14), even included living caterpillars that, over the course of the exhibition, died and began to decompose, giving off a stench that "aggressively dominat[ed] the space around it."<sup>147</sup> While paintings were in the minority, those that were included were of a highly charged nature. This is exemplified by Semsar Siahaan's painting, titled Tiket Sejarah Menuju Bencana (History's Ticket to Disaster) (fig 1.15), in which a face reminiscent of the devil dominates the painting's center. Its eye, in the form of the international symbol for nuclear energy, leads the viewer into a larger commentary on the evils of global capitalism, the result of which is chaos and destruction. Toxic chemicals spew from a barrel; a figure wears a gas mask; a dove, the symbol for international peace, falling from the sky. Each of these works evokes a visceral response in the viewer. Readymade materials challenge standard formats of fine art like sculpture while the subjects portrayed are explicit critiques of the social context in which these works were produced. For instance, during Suharto's New Order regime, the information environment was tightly controlled. The government placed restrictions on media outlets, and dissent was not tolerated. As a result, rumors sometimes served as a means for people to share information that was not officially sanctioned.<sup>148</sup> The state also maintained a powerful and extensive intelligence apparatus that put citizens on edge.<sup>149</sup> Harry Wahyu's inclusion of ears both painted and sculpted in his installation

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>144</sup> M. Dwi Marianto, "Bermain Bola' untuk Mengusir Kesuntukan," in *Slot in the Box* (Yogyakarta: Cemeti Gallery, April 1997), 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> Ibid., 12.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>146</sup> For more on the term *seni kontemporer* see Amanda Rath, "Contextualizing 'Contemporary Art': Propositions of Critical Artistic Practice in Seni Rupa Kontemporer in Indonesia," (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2011).
 <sup>147</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>148</sup> For more on control of media during Suharto's New Order see, David T. Hill, *The Press in New Order Indonesia* (Equinox Publishing, 2006).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>149</sup> For more on the state intelligence apparatus during Suharto's New Order see, Joshua Barker, "Controlling the Criminal Contagion in Suharto's New Order," *Indonesia* 66 (1998): 7-43.

aptly titled *Ear* might be read as a statement on this situation where it was necessary to keep your ears open and remain vigilant. The caterpillars which added texture and movement to the installation, wiggling about until they died, can be seen as a reference to state intelligence and the presence of secret agents moving throughout society and contributing to its decay. As Yusra Martunus explains, the Jendela artists considered the types of works displayed in *Slot in the Box* to be literally "too hard" (*terlalu keras*) in that they confronted the viewer head on.<sup>150</sup> Rudi Matnofani adds to this, stating that he sees his work in direct opposition to the directness of works included in *Slot in the Box* and exhibitions after 1998 that followed the end of Suharto's New Order regime.<sup>151</sup>

After 1998 the production of art that explicitly confronted social issues and politics proliferated. This was the result of greater freedoms of expression. Whereas prior to the end of Suharto's New Order regime an exhibition like *Slot in the Box* was not only exciting precisely because of how charged it was but also somewhat of a rarity due to fear of retribution from the state, after 1998, directly confronting social issues and politics became the norm. As Indonesian curator Asmudjo Jono Irianto writes, the result was a paradox.<sup>152</sup> Indonesian artists were able to mount critiques freely in a way that was not possible under Suharto. However, this led to a loss of "potency" because Suharto, the target of their critique was no longer in power. In this context the work of Jendela's members offered something different. This proved significant in the context of an art market boom in the mid-2000s.

Despite the effects of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the art market in Indonesia and the wider region experienced significant growth in the following decade. As historian Hélène Njoto-Feillard notes, while the financial crisis had a negative impact on other sectors in 1997, it paradoxically proved to be a dynamic moment for the region's art market. As a result of the weakened currency, floating money that was once placed in small stock market shares was invested in painting, which was considered to be a safe haven because it was internationally recognized.<sup>153</sup> Investment in and the growth of the region's art market was exacerbated further by the shift in the early 2000s in the global art market led by the inundation of capital into contemporary art. As Singapore curator and auction house executive Wang Zineng explains, auction houses played a significant role in this growth. Between 2005 and 2009, the number of lots of Southeast Asian art offered by the Hong Kong branches of Christie's and Sotheby's rose from approximately eighty in 2005 to more than 280 in 2009.<sup>154</sup>

This boom in Southeast Asian art followed on the heels of an interest in the global market a few years earlier in Chinese contemporary art. When Chinese contemporary art became too expensive, Chinese-Indonesian collectors focused their attention on their own backyards, driving up the prices of Indonesian artists.<sup>155</sup> In these auctions certain artists led sales, most notably I Nyoman Masriadi (b. 1973). Balinese by birth and now a resident of Yogyakarta, Masriadi is most noted for the 2008 sale of his work, *The Man from Bantul*, at Sotheby's Hong Kong for more than one million

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>150</sup> Interview with Yusra Martunus, October 13, 2017, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> Interview with Rudi Mantofani, August 24, 2019, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>152</sup> Asmudjo Jono Irianto, "An Unsettled Season: Political art of Indonesia," Art Asia Pacific, 28 (Oct – Dec 2000), https://artasiapacific.com/issue/an-unsettled-season?locale=en.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>153</sup> Hélène Njoto-Feillard, "L'Institution des ventes publiques: Les maîtres marchands de la peinture Indonésienne," *Archipel* 71 (2006): 194.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>154</sup> Wang Zineng, "Market Watch: Notes on the Contemporary Southeast Asian Art Market," *ThirdText* 25, 4 (2011): 463. <sup>155</sup> Njoto-Feillard addresses this in her article cited above titled, "The Institution of Public Auctions: The Master Dealers of Indonesian Painting." Of the Chinese origin of the "small community of collectors" in Java, she states, "The delicate question of ethnicity is rarely mentioned" (177). Further, she also states in the first paragraphs of this article that, "In the first decades following independence, during which public institutions were set up to promote the national arts, nothing seemed to predict the future omnipresence of Sino-Indonesians at all levels of the art market. Today, they reign supreme over the fluctuation of painters' prices" (178).

US dollars; this work realized approximately one hundred times its estimate. Works by members of Jendela did not fetch as fantastical prices as those by Masriadi, but they were not far behind in terms of the level of attention they received from the market beginning in the mid-2000s. This is evidenced by the fact that in 2009, twenty-one artists from Indonesia were listed by the data management outfit Artprice amongst the top 500 contemporary artists globally. This list ranks artists based on auction results. Rudi Mantofani, Handiwirman Saputra, Jumaldi Alfi, Yunizar, and M.Irfan or five of Jendela's six members were amongst these artists.<sup>156</sup>

Curators in Southeast Asia needed to make the work of Jendela's members legible following their market success. In part this can be attributed to the number of exhibitions that sought to promote Jendela and its members because of its market potential and the interest of collectors regionally in Southeast Asia. After 2005 the spaces where Jendela's exhibitions were held all had a direct connection to the market. Nadi Gallery, one of Indonesia's first commercial art spaces sponsored Jendela's 2005 exhibition. Valentine Wille, a fine art gallery in Kuala Lumpur hosted the group's 2007 exhibition. In 2009, Jendela had an exhibition at the National University of Singapore art museum. This exhibition received financial and organizational support from Singapore based Gajah Gallery. Notably, approximately six months prior to Jendela's show in Singapore, Gajah Gallery fully subsidized a solo exhibition of Masriadi's work at the Singapore Art Museum.<sup>157</sup> At this time Masriadi was under exclusive management of Gajah Gallery.<sup>158</sup>

Art historian Patrick D. Flores calls attention to the fact that for artists like Masriadi, validation at auction has contributed to critical recognition in text, albeit not extensive and with certain problems. For instance, Masriadi's exhibition at the Singapore Art Museum featured thirty-works all borrowed from collectors.<sup>159</sup> This presented the picture that his world was "fully formed" without "antecedents and precedents" as stated by Singaporean art historian T.K. Sabapathy.<sup>160</sup> As I will elaborate, a similar phenomenon can be traced in analyses of Jendela that associate this group with their Minangkabau identity. This is significant because in 2005 a connection to Minangkabau identity through adat became a binding thread to help explain what set Jendela and its members apart and even more so, what tied their work together. This is even though when Jendela was formed, its members did not intend for their group to be defined by their ethnic origins. This is evidenced by factors such that Jendela until now, has neither made a clear statement on the group's mission, philosophy, or aesthetic orientation nor do their works directly reference Minangkabau.

The tendency of curators and other art world players like auction houses and gallerists to place value on the ethno-national identity of artists in and associated with Southeast Asia is a reality that has been identified by art historians including Nora A. Taylor and David Teh.<sup>161</sup> Specifically, each describe how in international contexts national identity is inseparable from the description of Southeast Asian artists and their work. Knowing where an artist comes from makes their work more legible to diverse audiences. A similar phenomenon can be associated with the work of artists in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>156</sup> Thierry Ehrmann, Le Marché de l'Art Contemporain 2008/2009 Le Rapport Annual Artprice (Contemporary Art Market the Artprice Annual Report) (Artprice, 2009).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>157</sup> Patrick D. Flores, "The Masriadi Effect: Skill, Sensibility, Scale," World Art 1, no. 2 (2011), 217.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>159</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>161</sup> In her discussion of Japanese-Vietnamese artist Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba Nora A. Taylor calls attention to this artist's experience of returning to Vietnam, his father's country of birth, and being associated by international curators with this aspect of his identity. David Teh more broadly refers to this phenomenon in the introduction of his book on Thai identity and contemporary art. See Nora A. Taylor, "Running the Earth: Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba's *Breathing is Free: 12,756.3,*" in *The Migrant's Time: Rethinking Art History and Diaspora,* ed. Saloni Mathur (Williamstown: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2011), 206-226.; David Teh, *Thai Art: Currencies of the Contemporary* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2017).

Indonesia who do not hail from Java and make a name for themselves in Indonesia's art centers like Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Jakarta. This is evidenced by the experience of artists from Bali and Minangkabau where reference to their difference specifically, their ethnic and regional origins, is central to explanations of their work as well as their success despite the reality that they are still within the confines of their nation-state, Indonesia.

Each of Jendela's exhibitions from 1997 – 2002 acknowledge that the members of this group hailed from West Sumatra and were Minangkabau. This is a common practice in Indonesia. In exhibition catalogues city of birth is generally noted in an artist's biography. However, it is not common practice to ruminate on this detail. Indonesian curator Rizki A. Zaelani thus, took this connection a step further in his curatorial framing for Jendela's fifth exhibition in 2005, titled Biasa (Ordinary) at Nadi Gallery in Jakarta by centering a relationship to Minangkabau as the key to understanding the work of Jendela's members. The title of this exhibition encapsulates the connection Zaelani drew between the work of Jendela's members and their ethnic and regional origins. According to Zaelani, the tendency of Jendela's members to make indirect statements through their production of abstract and semi-abstract compositions was not simply a matter of "modernism or formalism."<sup>162</sup> Instead, it reflected an "ordinary" mode of expression in Minangkabau. Rather than commenting directly on contemporary issues like the sociopolitical context, the members of Jendela employed "figurative expressions" that were more polite or sophisticated in order to leave space for the audience to interpret the message portrayed.<sup>163</sup> The use of figurative speech, like the oath and poem (pantun) referenced in this dissertation's introduction, is according to Zaelani, "a casual and ordinary matter of a cultural tradition to which the members of Jendela were exposed since childhood."<sup>164</sup> By drawing a connection with the long history of linguistic expression in Minangkabau, Zaelani underlines the idea that for the members of Jendela, specifically, and Minangkabau artists, more generally, what matters is not what is expressed but how it is expressed. He referred to this as these artists "adat berkarya."<sup>165</sup> Berkarya refers to the process of making.<sup>166</sup> Attached to adat, this phrase becomes "the customary practice of making" of these artists.

Zaelani's assessment that the culture of figurative speech specific to Minangkabau binds Jendela's members remains visible today. In conversations that took place during my field work, members of Sakato and Jendela in Yogyakarta commonly referenced proverbs like "*lain padang lain bilalang, lain lubuak lain ikannyo*" (different fields, different grasshoppers, different ponds different fish). Utterance of such proverbs evoked an "aha" moment of collective understanding indicated by nods of agreement from everyone but myself. Like most figurative speech, the message portrayed in this particular proverb is not found in a direct translation. Instead, prior familiarity is necessary to grasp the intended moral. In the case of this proverb (*pepatal*) that is understood as an expression of adat the moral is that "every society has its own customs and norms that should be respected." Notably, Zaelani did not include a specific example such as this one in his curatorial essay for *Biasa*. He also did not acknowledge the fact that Minangkabau figurative speech informs the design of motifs that are found on Minangkabau traditional textiles and architectural forms. For example, as described in this dissertation's introduction the motif known as *pucuak rabuang* (young bamboo shoot) is seen as the visual translation of a Minangkabau poem (*pantun*) that describes an individual's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>162</sup> Rizki A. Zaelani, "Biasa: Kelompok Seni Rupa 'Jendela', Kini," 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>165</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>166</sup> The root word "karya" is translated variously as work, product, creation. This term is used to refer to an artwork. For instance, a painting, sculpture, or other type of object that results from an artist's labor. The prefix "ber" transforms karya into a verb, becoming "to work, produce, or create."

use function in society at each stage of their life. In short, Zaelani did not acknowledge antecedents and precedents that would have informed his argument concerning the connection of work by Jendela's members to Minangkabau adat. This rendered the artistic choices of Jendela's members as passive and inevitable. Minangkabau figurative speech however is anything but passive or inevitable. It is the result of a process that is embodied by the adage "nature acts as our teacher" (*alam takambang jadi guru*), the overarching principle of Minangkabau adat. To learn from nature (alam) necessitates dedicated and careful investigation of both tangible and intangible realms that constitute our experience of the world. My reference to tangible and intangible draws on the translation of alam as "nature," "universe," and "realms of perception."<sup>167</sup> This commitment and its results are evidenced by the works that were part of *Biasa* or the product of these artists" "adat berkarya."

For *Biasa*, each of Jendela's members created six to eight paintings. The exhibition view of Handiwirman Saputra (**fig 1.16**) and Jumaldi Alfi's (**fig 1.17**) paintings indicates that the works by each artist collectively engaged a common theme and were done in a similar vein. For example, in the still-life paintings that he made for *Biasa*, Handiwirman engages with utilitarian objects including fluorescent light bulbs, kapok, and paper. This reflects a general tendency in his practice discussed in this dissertation's introduction through my examination of his *Tak Berakar*, *Tak Berpucuk* series. Handiwirman's investigation of materiality and form is centered on objects part of our everyday experiences like trash and bits of cloth entwined with the roots of a bamboo grove or in the case of his works for *Biasa*, light bulbs, kapok, and paper. The result, large-scale still-life paintings like *Seri Kertas Lipat 2* (Folded Paper Series 2) (**fig 1.18**) and *Seri Bidang dan Bayangan Kapuk 1* (Cotton Field and Shadow Series I) (**fig 1.19**).

Each of Handiwirman's paintings for Biasa presents a different configuration of the eponymous objects that dominate the canvas and are set against a light green backdrop. This is evidenced by a comparison of Seri Kertas Lipat 2 and Seri Kertas Lipat 3 that are depicted side by side in the photograph of the exhibition view of Handiwirman's work (fig 1.16). Whereas the piece of paper depicted in the painting on the left (Seri Kertas Lipat 2) stands vertically, in the painting on the right (Seri Kertas Lipat 3) it is set on its side. Besides difference in the physical placement of the object this also results in difference in the shadow that the objects create and the lines that comprise them. These details are in turn, reflected in Handiwirman's compositions. Seri Benda dan Bayangan (Object and Shadow Series) (fig 1.20), another work created for Biasa, demonstrates further Handiwirman's process or adat berkarya. This work is comprised of four separate paintings displayed as one. Each painting depicts a different configuration and representation of a piece of kapuk, a piece of red string threaded through this kapuk, and the hand that presents the kapuk to the viewer. Except for the canvas at the bottom left, the hand is depicted in shadow. It is unclear what the salmon-colored form in the canvas at the bottom right is intended to represent. Handiwirman's intent, however, is not to portray an object's exact likeness to his viewer. By manipulating an object and presenting it from various angles Handiwirman visualizes his perception that tangible forms are in fact borderless entities. Each painting is itself an "object," the term that he uses to refer to all his work and thus, demonstrates the limitless possibilities of alam of which these objects are a part.<sup>168</sup> Traditionally, to visualize a specific idea associated with adat Minangkabau craftsman drew on organic forms that are more commonly associated with "nature" like bamboo plants. By engaging with utilitarian objects that are central to our existence as humans in the twenty-first century Handiwirman expands our sense of alam. In the case of his works for *Biasa* he does not portray a specific message per se. Instead, he draws attention to the aesthetic properties of alam's tangible manifestation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>167</sup> John M. Echols and Hassan Shadily, *Kamus Indonesia-Inggris (Indonesia-English Dictionary)*, edited by John U. Wolff and James T. Collins (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1989), 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>168</sup> Interview with Handiwirman Saputra, September 1, 2019, Jakarta, Indonesia.

Handiwirman, along with Yunizar, have both been said to work based on intuition.<sup>169</sup> For Handiwirman this might be seen in the way that one iteration of an object informs the next. His adat berkarya is based on trial and error and is not predetermined. For Yunizar a reliance on intuition manifests in his tendency towards semi-abstract and abstract compositions like *Angin dan Tanah* (Wind and Earth) (**fig 1.21**) and *Setelah Hujan* (**fig 1.22**). Each of these paintings is divided by a horizon line and constituted by lines that result in contrasting textures. Set against a black backdrop in *Angin dan Tanah* white lines dash across the canvas and crash into smaller less discernible black dots. This evokes a sense of chaos and disorder that contrasts with what appears to be the more careful placement of straight and curvy black lines in *Setelah Hujan*. Whereas the title of each of these works refer to naturally occurring phenomenon, they are not based on the artist's direct observation of either wind or rain. Instead, they evoke a feeling and experience that lives in his subconscious. In this way, they can be seen as a reflection of his visual representation of intangible facets of alam or how we sense, know, and experience the world.

The commitment to and careful investigation of alam is more systematic for Rudi Mantofani. A photograph (**fig 1.23**) of Jendela's members taken at *Biasa's* opening provides a glimpse at the paintings Rudi created for this exhibition. They all point to an interest in the environment and engage themes ranging from the precarity of our relationship to it to our destruction and reliance on it. For example, in *Ujung Pulau I* (End of the Island I) (**fig 1.24**), Rudi portrays a small village, set atop a giant cliff, comprised of a series of miniscule, nondescript houses and three small trees to its left. A pool of light seems to intentionally accentuate a verdant green landscape surrounding the village. However, the work's title along with the position of the village, sandwiched between a dark gray sky and the sheer enormity of the cliff that becomes progressively darker towards the bottom edge of the canvas, betray this light and instead exude a foreboding atmosphere that leaves the viewer unsettled. Rudi explained in conversation that in *Ujung Pulau I* and other works, he does not intend to speak "indirectly" but rather to find more "effective language" by arranging familiar objects in provocative ways.<sup>170</sup> The result is a "richer" image that "contains more meanings" that both challenge and allow the viewer to cultivate more knowledge than she would if an idea or message were portrayed directly.

Each of these examples demonstrate how a diversity of interests continues to characterize the work of Jendela's members. Because of this these examples do not represent the group as a whole. Nevertheless, these examples are significant to an understanding of each of Jendela's members because they demonstrate how each, through their own "adat berkarya" taps into an experience or facet of alam to produce works that challenge our perception much in the same way that figurative expressions do. In my analyses I have differentiated between tangible and intangible facets of alam. For instance, I identify Handiwirman's attention to physical objects like paper as an example of alam's tangible manifestation. In contrast, I consider Yunizar's abstraction as an example of his visualization of alam's intangibility, his subconscious or "realms of perception." Here my intention is to highlight the myriad possibilities afforded by alam as a source of inspiration for visual artists like the members of Jendela as well as other Minangkabau-born artists discussed throughout this dissertation. At the same time, I also see the tangible and intangible as inseparable. This is because by letting "alam" (nature, universe, and realms of perception) act as a teacher, an individual does not distinguish between body and mind or the subconscious. Each inform the other and are shaped further by the sociocultural context that an individual is a part of and the background that they come from. In this way, the product of an artist's "adat berkarya," a process that is inseparable

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>169</sup> Grace Samboh, "Spektrum Praktik Estetik Jendela," 68.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>170</sup> Interview with Rudi Mantofani, August 24, 2019, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

from letting alam act as a teacher, is also a manifestation of alam because it is a representation of an artist's "universe."

Jendela's members almost never intentionally draw directly on specific examples of figurative speech in their production of art works or take a specific phenomenon like the bamboo sprout, as a point of reference. In this Handiwirman is an exception as demonstrated by his engagement with objects like paper and kapuk as well as the association of his work with specific examples of Minangkabau figurative speech. Here I am referring to the oath that informs the title of his Tak Berakar, Tak Berpucuk series described in this dissertation's introduction. Notably, Handiwirman asserts that he did not intend to associate his Tak Berakar, Tak Berpucuk series with Minangkabau figurative speech, however, he does not deny this association. He explained that he is interested in developing a deeper understanding of how his work is read a contemporary representation of the oath, "ka ateh indak bapucuak, ka bawah indak baurek, ditangah dilariak kumbang" (on the top no shoots, from the bottom no roots, the middle eaten out by beetles), and even more so, Minangkabau adat, albeit transformed by his creative labor.<sup>171</sup> The first indication of which he explained is the inversion of the relationship between the roots (I: akar or M: baurek) and shoots (I: pucuk or M: bapucuak).<sup>172</sup> Whereas the oath begins from the metaphorical tree's new growth or its tip, Handiwirman's title begins from an object's roots or as he describes, its origins. In this case, that was the riverbank near his home where discarded pieces of cloth and trash had become entangled in a bamboo grove along the river's edge creating a fusion between waste and nature. Through his ongoing production of objects part of the Tak Berakar, Tak Berpucuk series Handiwirman has effectively breathed new life into this scene and its contents just as he has done with the oath that is now associated with this series. In the next section, I turn to a similar phenomenon namely, how Minangkabau-born artists are reshaping or breathing new life into adat, by looking at when and with what effects Sakato rebranded itself through an association with Minangkabau adat.

### Sakato's Annual Exhibition, Bakaba

The Sakato Art Community made two major changes to the group's identity in 2009. First, Sanggar Sakato became Kelompok Seni Sakato (the Sakato Art Group). Second, the title *Bakaba* was chosen for the group's annual exhibition. Erizal AS explained to me that the decision to change the group's name arose from a desire to make its identity more legible to a broader audience. Whereas "group" is not a word specific to Indonesia but rather, familiar to speakers of other languages, the term "sanggar" is illegible without an understanding of Indonesian and Indonesian art history.<sup>173</sup> This desire to make Sakato legible to a presumably international audience is further evidenced by the fact that it is now common practice to use the English "Sakato Art Community" on social media platforms like Instagram where the group promotes its activities.<sup>174</sup> The year 2009, when these changes occurred, followed just after and in the context of the boom in Indonesian painting that resulted in the proliferation of new art events in Yogyakarta and elsewhere in the region to promote the work of artists to collectors, gallerists, and art world observers. In Yogyakarta, this proliferation of new events is generally timed in correlation with Art Jog and what since 2015 has been referred to as Jogja Art Weeks.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>171</sup> Interview with Handiwirman Saputra, September 1, 2019, Jakarta, Indonesia.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>173</sup> Interview with Erizal AS, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>174</sup> Instagram @sakatoartcommunity.

Art Jog was conceived in 2008 to fill a perceived void both in Yogyakarta and Indonesia's wider art world. Namely, a site for and by artists where artwork could be made available to both national and international collectors and where artists would be given the opportunity to learn about the mechanisms of the market.<sup>175</sup> Unlike more traditional art fairs whereby galleries display the work of artists they represent in individual booths, Art Jog is "bottom up" in that it highlights artists rather than galleries. In this way, its display is reminiscent of other large-scale curated exhibitions such as the many biennials that can now be found across Indonesia specifically and Southeast Asia generally. Since Art Jog's inception it has become one of the most anticipated events in Indonesia's art world calendar, drawing collectors, gallerists, and a general public interested in art. It has also contributed to the growth of Yogyakarta's arts ecosystem because each year in correlation with Art Jog art spaces across the city organize exhibitions in anticipation of the crowds that Art Jog will draw. This creates a festival like atmosphere and in 2015, contributed to the establishment of Jogja Art Weeks to help organize the plethora of events happening across the city and surrounding areas by publishing a calendar of events. Along with the group's name, when Sakato rebranded its annual exhibition, it was in the context of growing competition that was the result of an increased density of art events taking place in Yogyakarta. From Minangkabau "bakaba" has a direct connection to this group's ethnic and regional origins and was a way to help distinguish Sakato from the myriad other groups and collectives across this city.

In Minangkabau the term *bakaba* has two meanings. First, it is the verb form of *kaba*, which can be translated as "news" (n.) or the "act of communicating by spreading information" (v.). Second, it refers to a form of traditional Minangkabau literature (kesusastraan) that is considered to be the most important type of prose literature, along with tambo (annals or traditional historiography of Minangkabau).<sup>176</sup> Eight iterations of Bakaba have been organized since 2009. Each time that this event is held a subtheme is chosen that either draws directly on Minangkabau culture or becomes a point of reference for thinking about the contemporary character of Minangkabau.<sup>177</sup> For instance, the subtheme of Bakaba #4 in 2014 was "Randang dan Rendang," referring to Minangkabau's most famous cuisine, a beef slow cooked in coconut milk and spices referenced in this dissertation's introduction. In West Sumatra this food is referred to as randang while outside of West Sumatra it becomes rendang. As a subtheme, this reference was intended to touch on the effects of cultural transfer and its development, both geographically and over time. However, like the members of Jendela, it is rarely the case that any of Sakato's members directly reference Minangkabau culture in their work, let alone kaba and Minangkabau linguistic and literary history. Like Sakato's inaugural exhibition in 1996, Bakaba is marked by a diversity of works from Sakato's approximately one hundred members. This diversity is highlighted by a collection of exhibition views from Bakaba #6, held in 2017 (figs. 1.25 - 1.27) that portray various stylistic and thematic interests. Within this diversity painting continues to dominate the work of Sakato's members. The event as a whole, as opposed to individual works, highlights how Sakato's members used the term bakaba as a branding mechanism for this exhibition.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>175</sup> Katherine Bruhn, "Art Jog and Indonesia's New Art Public," *Explorations* (2017), 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>176</sup> Taufk Abdullah, "Some Notes on the Kaba Tjindua Mato: An Example of Minangkabau Traditional Literature," *Indonesia* 9 (April 1970): 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>177</sup> In 2015, the subtheme of *Bakaba* #5 was the proverb, "*Cadiak Indak Mambuang Pandai*." Translated loosely, this phrase refers to an individual who is "*cadiak*" (Indonesian: *cerdik*) or possesses a certain type of sharp-witted intelligence. Aware of such intelligence, one who is *cadiak* does not waste it but rather puts it to use for the good of society. As a subtheme, this reference was intended to call to mind notable Minangkabau intellectuals, artists, politicians, etc. and in doing so, remind a younger generation of Minangkabau of their responsibility to guard the legacy of these figures. This call to action, can be said to have carried over into *Bakaba* #6 that had the subtheme "IndONEsia." Again, this exhibition highlighted the accomplishments of Minangkabau, and its contribution to Indonesian history.

In an essay included in the exhibition catalogue for the first iteration of *Bakaba*, Minangkabau-born cultural theorist Yasraf Amir Piliang explains that, historically, kaba was performed orally. It was dependent upon a *tukang kaba* (speaker) and an audience with a shared knowledge system.<sup>178</sup> While central to the delivery of kaba, the speaker was not necessarily the author. Kaba was instead understood as a collective process that played out in social spaces specific to Minangkabau like the *lapau* (small food stall where men especially gathered to talk and share information), *surau* (prayer house), and *dangau* (small hut usually found in the middle of a rice field).<sup>179</sup> As a form of storytelling, kaba functioned primarily to pass on knowledge regarding ethics or how to live a moral life through reference to Minangkabau adat.<sup>180</sup> In the contemporary era, what constitutes kaba has expanded. For example, it has been written and recorded.<sup>181</sup> However, it was not until Sakato's engagement with this term that it entered the realm of visual expression.

Sakato's engagement with kaba is noteworthy because it points to efforts to articulate an understanding of artistic production that is unique to Minangkabau and rooted in a much longer history of expression specific to this group and region. This interest in identifying localized terminologies for "art" in Indonesia parallels Indonesian curator and art historian Jim Supangkat's ongoing interest in the Javanese term kagunan (art, marked by a certain sensibility). Supangkat's attention to kagunan can be understood in relation to the desire to better understand the history of modernism than is possible by tracing the genealogy of the more common term for art used in Indonesia "seni," which has no basis in any of Indonesia's ethnic languages.<sup>182</sup> Seni was first used in the early twentieth century with the adoption of Indonesian as the language of the nationalist movement.<sup>183</sup> The term kagunan was likely first used sometime in the nineteenth century.<sup>184</sup> In contrast to seni, the longer history of kagunan lends new insights concerning the emergence of art concepts amongst Javanese nobility and intellectuals who were in conversation with the colonial government. As for the meaning of kagunan, Patrick Flores sums up what are at times Supangkat's dense descriptions of this term, writing that kagunan is "roughly, the 'aesthetic,' in which moral concepts, the feeling of awe and awakening, within a collective context take precedence over 'individual potential in making progress and breakthroughs' and avant-gardism."<sup>185</sup> While the term kaba, unlike kagunan, refers to a specific form of linguistic expression performed orally, like kagunan, its history and meaning likely relate to how certain ideals held by society were transmitted from *pemangku adat* (adat experts) in Minangkabau to the Minangkabau general populace.

<sup>181</sup> Umar Junus, "Kaba and Novel and Minangkabau Society: History of Ideas," *Humaniora* XII, no 2 (2000): 181.

http://globalartmuseum.de/site/guest\_author/222.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>178</sup> Yasraf Amir Piliang, "The Aura of Kaba, The Visual Narration," in *Bakaba* #1 (Yogyakarta: Sakato Art Community, 2010), 41.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>180</sup> This point is reinforced by Minangkabau-born historian Taufk Abdullah (1970) who states that *tambo* dealt with issues related to the development of adat in Minangkabau while *kaba*, focused on the ideal conduct of life in accordance with these norms (2).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>182</sup> In October 2018, the journal *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, published a collection of essays focused on how terms including modern, contemporary, and art have been translated and understood in Southeast Asia's vernacular languages. In this, essays by Simon Soon and Jim Supangkat are informative for what they reveal about the history of the term "seni." A simplified way to look at what is meant by "seni rupa" is to consider it as an overarching reference for the plastic arts including forms like painting and sculpture that were not developed out of local traditions.; See Thanavi Chotpradit et al., "Terminologies of "Modern" and "Contemporary" "Art" in Southeast Asia's Vernacular Languages: Indonesian, Javanese, Khmer, Lao, Malay, Myanmar/Burmese, Tagalog/Filipino, Thai and Vietnamese," *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 2, no. 2 (2018): 65-195.
<sup>183</sup> Jim Supangkat, "The 'Seni' Manifesto," Global Art and the Museum, accessed February 9, 2012,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>184</sup> Supangkat bases his argument on the inclusion of *kagunan* in the Javanese dictionary known as *Bausastra Jawa* compiled by the Javanese scholar Ronggawarsita (1802-24 – 1873).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>185</sup> Patrick Flores, "Field Notes from Artworlds," Third Text 25, no. 4 (2011), 390.

The "performance" of kaba in the Sakato exhibitions differs from the traditional delivery of kaba. Nevertheless, significant parallels can be drawn, and divergences identified between kaba and Bakaba that signal new meaning attributed to this form by Sakato. In Sakato's version of kaba, the exhibition hall becomes the shared social space that welcomes an audience with a shared knowledge system about visual art. Unlike kaba, which was traditionally performed in Minangkabau for a Minangkabau audience, Sakato's kaba is "multilingual." This is because Sakato's kaba is based on visual language and the translation of exhibition texts from Indonesian to English. It is also performed in the rantau (beyond the Minangkabau homeland) and reflects the position of Sakato's members as part of the Minangkabau diaspora. By engaging with kaba, Sakato acknowledges the Minangkabau homeland. They also underscore their association with and recognition of other worlds that they are a part. The use of Indonesian points to this group's identification with Indonesia's national art world while the importance that the group places on the inclusion of English translations in their exhibition catalogues signifies their desire for international legibility. Further, whereas traditionally kaba was performed by a single speaker (*tukang kaba*), there are multiple speakers that contribute to Sakato's kaba. Participants include the community as a whole and individual artists who contribute work to the exhibition. As such, whereas kaba might have traditionally resulted in a single message or story, Sakato's kaba contains multiple plot lines. Together they constitute an annual statement on the work of these artists and their relationship to Minangkabau culture as members of the Minangkabau diaspora that constitutes one pole of Alam Minangkabau. This connection to Minangkabau culture and adat is reflected in the subthemes that are chosen and the essays that are written to accompany each year's exhibition. Some critics argue that because Bakaba is now held in conjunction with Art Jog, it is nothing more than a commercial enterprise intended to sell the work of Sakato's members. There is more at play each time that Bakaba is staged. This is demonstrated by Sakato's choice to rebrand their exhibition through kaba and engage each year with a subtheme that is directly connected to Minangkabau history and adat.

The final section of this chapter considers how the current strength of both Sakato and Jendela, along with the establishment of another community known as the Tambo Arts Center in West Sumatra, has contributed to the growth of an art world that connects the heartland in West Sumatra and the diaspora in Yogyakarta. The continued significance of merantau in and to Minangkabau has contributed to the relationship between Sakato and the Tambo Arts Center and, subsequently, the growth of a contemporary Minangkabau art world.

### Shaping a Contemporary Minangkabau Art World

In this chapter I have focused on artists affiliated with the Sakato Art Community and the Jendela Art Group. Since the mid-1990s, these artists have lived in the city of Yogyakarta on the island of Java. The members of these groups were neither the first artists from Minangkabau to try and make a name for themselves outside of West Sumatra nor the first art communities associated with this region. However, because of the sociopolitical and economic contexts that have defined their careers, they have had a very different experience than their forefathers. They benefited from resources and infrastructure necessary to support their careers, thanks to the growth of the region's art market and the commercial success of fellow Minangkabau artists. Moreover, they came of age in a context in which it was possible to celebrate their regional origins after decades of stigma associated with Minangkabau. This final section situates these communities in relation to a much longer history of outward migration from Minangkabau that, over time, has contributed to the shape of the Minangkabau world. These groups also demonstrate significant shifts in the process of merantau that are the result of conditions that define our present movement.

Historically, outward migration was a circular process. This meant that the migrant was expected to return home to help grow Minangkabau.<sup>186</sup> However, beginning in the mid-twentieth century, this practice became increasingly unidirectional—and remains so today.<sup>187</sup> Migrants were no longer motivated to return to West Sumatra after leaving because of the opportunities afforded in major urban centers and cities in Java. This shift to permanent migration has defined the experience of many Minangkabau-born contemporary artists, like those discussed in this chapter, who now call Yogyakarta home. Whereas Yogyakarta is a kind of mecca for the arts because of the density of arts infrastructure, access to the market, and number of artists living near one another, in West Sumatra not only are galleries limited and art events infrequent but also artists are dispersed across the province, which makes it difficult to meet on a regular basis. As a result, a new kind of stigma has emerged. Today, returning to West Sumatra is often equated with defeat or failure as a migrant because of the difficulty of pursuing one's career as an artist there. This does not mean, however, that the migrant has forgotten his responsibility to Minangkabau. Rather, artists like those affiliated with Sakato find new ways to give back to the growth of Minangkabau. In doing so Alam Minangkabau is transformed.

Since its formation in 1995, Sakato has become an important resource for new arrivals to Yogyakarta. Upon their arrival to this city, Minangkabau artists gain access to a network and infrastructure, including the galleries owned by members of Jendela and other artists who benefited from the mid-2000s market boom. In contrast, in the late 1990s the founders of Sakato were forced to rely on the experience of only a handful of senior Minangkabau artists in Yogyakarta. Today, many of Sakato's members feel as if, through this organization, they can give back to a metaphorical homeland. Until only recently there was little interest in giving back to artists in West Sumatra or supporting the development of arts infrastructure there. Artists in Yogyakarta have it much easier than those in West Sumatra. However, for members of Sakato, this inattention to the Minangkabau homeland did not matter because the goal of Sakato was to support those artists who chose to leave West Sumatra and commit themselves to the development of their careers as full-time artists in Yogyakarta. While it is of course generally positive to support the development of West Sumatra's art world, members of Sakato recognized that their community's resources are finite, and it is impossible to support everyone. By developing the careers of Minangkabau artists outside of West

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>186</sup> In his study of merantau Tsuyoshi Kato includes the following pantun (poem) that encapsulates this imperative to go outward before returning home to Minangkabau: "karatau madang dihulu, babuah babungo balun, marantau bujan dahulu, dirumah baguon balun." The English translation reads, "go rantau and grow upstream, no fruit no flowers yet, go merantau young man first, at home no use yet" (118, fn2).; See Tsuyoshi Kato, *Matriliny and Migration: Evolving Minangkabau Traditions in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>187</sup> In his study of merantau Tsuyoshi Kato identifies "stages of rantau" that include: a legendary period up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a period from the late-19th century - 1930s, and from the 1930s onward. This corresponds with Mochtar Naim's "types of rantau that include: village segmentation (stage 1), circulatory merantau (stage 2), and merantau cino (stage 3). The earliest type of merantau, village segmentation, involved the creation of new settlements as additional agricultural lands were needed to support a growing population. This was followed by circulatory merantau carried out by individual males such as those described in the poem above, either prior to or after marriage and usually within a relatively short distance from the home village (i.e. likely within the territory that today comprises West Sumatra). Unlike village segmentation, occupations pursued as part of circulatory merantau were nonagricultural including work as merchants, civil servants, teachers, or artisans (Kato 1982, 30). Finally, the most "recent" stage of merantau, referred to as merantau Cino or Chinese merantau is understood in relation to traditional patterns of Chinese migration in Indonesia whereby a Chinese migrant entertained the idea of eventually going back home, but typically married locally and seldom returned to China (Kato 1982, 32fn11). Unlike circulatory merantau, merantau Cino was associated with nuclear families that either migrated as a unit or eventually reunited in the rantau. The movement undertaken covered long distances and was directed towards large urban centers such as Jakarta. As Kato explains, the result of such long distances was a change in the relationship of the migrant to their home village. They were no longer as close as they had been in previous stages of merantau.

Sumatra, they would still be able to support and grow Minangkabau culture, albeit away from the homeland. In essence, the logic of merantau as practiced by Sakato has flipped; that is, rather than taking the knowledge and skills that they gained beyond West Sumatra back to their villages to develop the Minangkabau homeland, they utilize this knowledge to develop an expanded homeland at the Sakato Art Community. The actual manifestation of this home-away-from-home is exemplified by the exclusionary character of *Bakaba*. For instance, after Sakato's inaugural exhibition in 1996 that included non-Minangkabau artists, Sakato became increasingly exclusionary. Artists who were not members of Sakato were not invited to participate in this group's exhibitions. This included Minangkabau-born artists living in West Sumatra. In 2017 there was a momentary shift whereby artists in West Sumatra were invited to submit works to *Bakaba*. This insider-outsider tension is an important aspect of Alam Minangkabau that not only defines the experience of migrants part of the Minangkabau diaspora but also individuals that live in the Minangkabau homeland. This is demonstrated by the establishment of the Tambo Arts Center in West Sumatra.

In 2016 former members of Sakato now living in West Sumatra formed the Tambo Arts Center. At the outset the founders referred to their group as "Kampuang Sakato." The use of kampuang, which translates to village, is a nod to members' connection with Yogyakarta.<sup>188</sup> The motivation to form Kampuang Sakato grew out of a desire to encourage one another to continue to make, display, and sell art despite the limitations that each face living in West Sumatra. The return of these individuals from Yogyakarta coincided with the establishment of the Department of Fine Arts at ISI Padang Panjang in 2006. The new department offered returning artists employment opportunities as lecturers, and ISI Padang Panjang became a meeting point for artists who had been members of Sakato in Yogyakarta. In 2017 Kampuang Sakato changed its name to Tambo Arts Center to make this group and its associated activities more inclusive and localized. Instead of looking back to Yogyakarta, the group could focus on West Sumatra. Like Sakato in Yogyakarta, Tambo Arts Center's primary activity is an annual exhibition. Since 2016 it has grown to include an art tour designed to attract collectors and other visitors to West Sumatra in the lead up to the annual exhibition.<sup>189</sup> When Sakato in Yogyakarta invited artists based in West Sumatra to participate in Bakaba in 2017, it was in response to a renewed vigor and seriousness amongst artists in West Sumatra that could not go unnoticed by their peers in Yogyakarta. The visibility of the Tambo Arts Center and its activities has only grown because of communication technologies and platforms, like Instagram, that allow artists in disparate locations to display their work and activities in a virtual space.<sup>190</sup>

The history of Sakato and more recent development of the Tambo Arts Center shows that despite a shift in the orientation of migrants towards the Minangkabau homeland, in the contemporary era the establishment of new groups has resulted in new connections between the Minangkabau homeland and the diaspora. These connections have resulted in the inclusion of West

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>188</sup> The establishment of Kampuang Sakato again parallels the history and activities of Sanggar Dewata whereby former members of SDI who had returned to Bali established a group there to maintain connections with their counterparts in Yogyakarta. By using the term "village" in the name of their community, they were indicating their difference from Sakato in Yogyakarta and situating themselves in the heartland or site of origin of Sakato's members.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>189</sup> The first of such tours was held in September 2017. Each time such a tour has been held, Jakarta-based art collector and patron Melani Setiawan who is known affectionately as "Ibu Melani" has played a primary role. As a defacto tour leader, she has ensured the participation of foreign guests including French art collectors based in Jakarta and Singapore based collectors. Each tour usually includes stops at key cultural sites in the region like Sianok Canyon as well as visits to smaller exhibitions across the province hosted by various communities. To my knowledge, these tours have not resulted in major sales from the Tambo Art Center's exhibition, however, tour participants usually buy smaller works throughout the week to support the communities they visit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>190</sup> Instagram @tamboartscenter.

Sumatra-based artists in exhibitions in Yogyakarta and the display of works by members of Jendela in West Sumatra as part of Tambo Art Center's annual exhibition. All of this has, in turn, contributed to a contemporary art world defined by its members' identification with Minangkabau that would not be possible if it were not for the continued significance of merantau and the ways in which the act of merantau contributes to a realm of imagined familiarity rooted in a relationship with home—the physical homeland of West Sumatra or an imagined homeland synonymous with Minangkabau culture. At a time when Indonesia's government has placed emphasis on the necessity of growing "creative ecosystems" to support the nation's creative economy, the shape of a contemporary Minangkabau art world reveals that historical modes of world-making, like merantau, contribute to the growth of networks that support the production of art, discourse, and economic growth of the region.<sup>191</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>191</sup> Following the lead of various nations globally, all interested in the potential of culture or creativity as a stimulant for growth, in 2011, Indonesia established a Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. Along with job growth, increased GDP, and regional development, this ministry's strategic plan stated that the mobilization of tourism and creative economy, would "lead to the realization of prosperity and a positive quality of life for the Indonesian people" (Kemenparekraf 2012). In 2015, an agency known as BEKRAF (*Badang Ekonmoi Kreatif* or Creative Economy Body) was established to manage the growth of the nation's creative economy. As a non-ministerial government institution BEKRAF had a higher level of autonomy. Under BEKRAF, the term *ekosistem* (ecosystem) emerged as central in discourse concerning the imperative to grow connections within and across sectors.

# Introduction

A photograph from the final years of Minangkabau-born artist Nashar's (1928–94) life shows him sitting next to a freshly blocked canvas and staring off into the distance (**fig 2.1**). Behind him, several finished paintings are neatly hung. These paintings provide a glimpse of his repertoire. The painting at the bottom right includes two ghost-like figures and is characteristic of the last phase of Nashar's career from roughly 1988 until his death in 1994. The other canvases are comprised of contrasting colors and a dizzying array of forms. They represent his unique approach to art making defined by "Three-Nons": without concept (*non-prakonsepsi*), a desired aesthetic (*non-estetik*), or the intention to use any technique (*non-teknik*) to achieve a certain outcome.<sup>192</sup>

Today, Nashar is an enigma because of factors ranging from his eccentric lifestyle to contributions he made both visual and written to the development of Indonesian modernism. In his lifetime Nashar was destitute. Yet, he remained unequivocally committed to his chosen vocation as an artist. Early in his career he was told that he had no skill. Among those who made this charge was revolutionary painter and founding father of Indonesian modern art Sindudarsono Sudjojono (1913–85). In the 1940s, when Indonesia was under Japanese occupation (1942–45), Nashar approached Sudjojono in his studio in the Japanese cultural center Keimin Bunka Shidōsho with a desire to join this studio.<sup>193</sup> When Nashar presented his work to Sudjojono, he responded, "Nas, you have no skill."<sup>194</sup> Despite this Nashar persisted.

Having migrated to Java with his family as a teenager, Nashar spent almost the entirety of his life in the rantau or outside of West Sumatra. As a member of the Minangkabau diaspora in Java he was not entirely freed from the confines of Minangkabau social structure, however. Specifically, his father exerted significant control on his early life in Java. This control was a critical factor in Nashar's own drive to free himself from external pressures that hindered his creative pursuits. For instance, it is often mentioned in biographical accounts that rather than return home to his wife and children, Nashar slept on the floor of Balai Budaya, the first art gallery established in Central Jakarta in the post-independence period. He could not bear the restrictions that family life placed on his art. This desire to be free from external constraints also characterized his ideological stance in the contentious climate that marked the first decades of Indonesia's independence.

Nashar came of age in the context of Indonesia's revolutionary struggle (1945–49) and the first decades of Indonesia's recognized independence from the Dutch. This period from roughly 1945 – 1966 was marked by significant sociopolitical tumult. It culminated in the events surrounding what is known as the 30<sup>th</sup> September Movement or G30S (Gerakan 30 September), which resulted in the elimination of Indonesia's communist party and the subsequent mass killings of suspected communist sympathizers from 1966–68.<sup>195</sup> Nashar opposed communism and aligned himself with

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>192</sup> This photograph is part of the private archive of artists Sulebar M. Soekarman and Nunung W.S. both of whom were Nashar's students in Jakarta.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>193</sup> Nashar, Nashar oleh Nashar (Jogjakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 2002), 13.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>195</sup> For more on the events surrounding G30S and the communist massacres in Indonesia see John Roosa, *Buried Histories: The Anticommunist Massacres of 1965-1966 in Indonesia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020) and John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30<sup>th</sup> Movement and Suharto's Coup d'Etat in Indonesia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

the artists and intellectuals who advocated for artistic autonomy. The development of his Three-Nons occurred in the aftermath of these events. It thus cannot be separated from politics. However, by looking only to the sociopolitical context that defined Nashar's career the importance of his ethnic and regional origins is missed.

Nashar does not make explicit reference to Minangkabau in either his visual or written work. However, the social network that he was a part of in Jakarta points to the part that Alam Minangkabau (the Minangkabau world) played in the development of both his thinking and its outward expression. Along with Nashar, three other Minangkabau-born artists, who like Nashar chose to spend the majority of their lives in Jakarta from the revolutionary era until their respective deaths are recognized for their contributions to the development of Indonesian modernism. These artists include Oesman Effendi (hereafter OE) (1919–85), Rusli (1916–2005), and Zaini (1926–77). Unlike the artists discussed in chapter one who are part of the Sakato Art Community and the Jendela Art Group, these artists, who I refer to as "Jakarta's Minangkabau modernists," did not formally organize themselves. However, it is evident from their writings that they were in frequent contact with one another and often served as each other's staunchest critics. Because of this, this chapter takes Nashar's life and work as a primary reference point through which to consider the forces that shaped not only his life but also that of his Minangkabau compatriots.

Along with their work as visual artists, Nashar and OE were both active writers. Whereas OE is best known for shorter texts, many of which were delivered as speeches, Nashar wrote essays for exhibition catalogues and articles for journals and newspapers and produced two book-length texts, a memoir from his early life to ca. 1963, titled *Nashar oleh Nashar* (Nashar by Nashar), and a collection of what historian Jeffrey Hadler refers to as "parafictional" letters written ca. 1968–74, titled *Surat-Surat Malam* (Night Letters).<sup>196</sup> Together, these volumes constitute a rare first-person look at the history and development of Indonesian visual art from the end of the Japanese occupation through the first decade of Suharto's New Order regime. These texts provide insight into Nashar's trajectory as an artist as well as the sociopolitical context that shaped his creative work. The nature of these sources is one reason why Nashar's life and work take precedence in this chapter, which ultimately aims to explain why he, OE, Rusli, and Zaini have been positioned as part of a distinct "aesthetic school" (*mazhab estetika*). They show that the work produced by this group of artists diverged from the two dominant streams—at the schools and institutions at Bandung and Yogyakarta—in the development of Indonesian painting in the post-independence period.

The schools in Bandung and Yogyakarta, both on the island of Java, were established shortly after Indonesia's declaration of independence in 1945. The character of each city along with the teachers at each institution helped to shape the curriculum. As a result, the perception took hold that each school was defined by a particular aesthetic orientation. Whereas Bandung, deemed the "laboratory of the West," was seen to produce artists dedicated to an engagement with western-oriented abstraction, Yogyakarta, once designated the seat of the revolution, was seen to foster artists whose work was marked by an interest in reality.<sup>197</sup> As art historian Aminudin TH Siregar writes, in contrast to the artists trained at Bandung and Yogyakarta, Nashar, OE, Rusli, and Zaini created compositions that portray an interest in "realities of the inner realm" (*kenyataan-kenyataan dari wilayah dalam*) and are marked by a tendency to "dig into the subconscious mind, bring to the fore

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>196</sup> Jeffrey A. Hadler, *"Night Letters:* The Ambiguous Archive of Soeharto's New Order (1968 – 1977)," in *Kyoto-Berkeley Seminar on Indonesia* (Berkeley: Center for Southeast Asia Studies, 2014), 55.; It is not clear when *Nashar oleh Nashar* was written. The only published version of this text that I have located was published in 2002 as a single volume along with the text of *Surat-Surat Malam*. *Surat-Surat Malam* was initially published in the cultural journal *Budaya Jaya* in October 1976. In December 1976, it was then published by the Jakarta Arts Council (*Dewan Kesenian Jakarta*) as a book.
<sup>197</sup> For succinct descriptions of the history and character of each of these institutions see Helena Spanjaard, *Artists and their Inspiration: A Guide through Indonesia Art History (1930-2015)* (Volendam: LM Publishers, 2016), 47-82.

hypnotic potential on the surface of the canvas, reveal 'essential' forms, and provide an impression of the artist's situation of solitude (and in some cases, psychotic tendencies)."<sup>198</sup> Nashar's *Larut Malam* (Lost in Darkness) (**fig 2.2**) exemplifies this turn towards the inner realm in its lack of representational forms. Three evenly spaced thick black brushstrokes dominate the center of this canvas. Set against a red backdrop yellow lines border the black forms while other yellow lines emanate outward from them. This creates a sense of movement across the canvas. Elsewhere blueish gray lines parallel the black brushstrokes and light brown dots add additional texture to the composition. Its title, "Lost in Darkness," is one that appears frequently across Nashar's repertoire. Specifically, each letter part of *Surat-Surat Malam* (Night Letters) is signed "Larut Malam." Nashar's tendency to work late into the night, ruminating on issues related to art, life and politics implies a situation of solitude. However, through these same letters alongside his memoir we learn that Nashar was actively engaged in conversations with intellectuals and cultural producers in Jakarta including his Minangkabau compatriots.

Nashar created *Larut Malam* in 1977. This was four years after Nashar began to assert in writing the parameters of his Three-Nons. By tracing the development of his Three-Nons, I argue that *Larut Malam* is representative of Nashar's embodiment of this non-theory. I also argue that it demonstrates continuities with the work of contemporary Minangkabau born artists like Jendela's members discussed in chapter one and Erizal AS discussed in chapter three. These artists each draw on facets of alam (nature, universe, and realms of perception) in their work that results in abstract and semi-abstract compositions. Similarly, Nashar and OE, whose works are each looked at in this chapter, demonstrate an attention to the idea of letting "nature act as our teacher" that resulted in compositions characterized by a lack of representational forms. As such, while Nashar and OE did not directly reference nature by depicting things like landscapes, the environment consistently figured in their adat berkarya.

The goals of this chapter are twofold. First, it addresses the complexities of cultural politics and art making in the post-independence period, ca. 1950-77. Second, it considers how Minangkabau adat influenced the work of Nashar and his compatriots. Here, adat is evident in the experience of these artists as migrants. It is also evidence in their art through their engagement with alam and embrace of the idea that "nature acts as our teacher." To date, significant attention has not been given to the relationship of these artists' work and their ethnic and regional origins. An exhibition at Jakarta's cultural center Taman Ismail Marzuki in November 2017 titled Lukisan Tanpa Teori (Theoryless Paintings) was an exception.<sup>199</sup> As is writing by Aminudin TH Siregar that comments on the distinct position of these artists in the historiography of Indonesian modern art.<sup>200</sup> The lack of attention to the regional and ethnic origins of these artists during their own lifetimes can be traced to the debate on the best direction for Indonesian culture or national identity that predominated in the first decade after independence and was further complicated by the rise and elimination of the Left. It was not until the 1970s that ethnic and regional identity began to emerge as relevant factors in cultural production. At that time, large number of artists returned to their places of birth or traveled to sites like Bali in search of new references and inspiration for the development of their art and, subsequently, Indonesian modernism.

A brief overview of Indonesia's political milieu ca. 1950–66 follows this introduction. It draws attention to the cultural organization, known as Lekra (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, Institute

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>198</sup> Aminudin TH Siregar, "Mazhab Estetika Seniman Minang di Indonesia," *Sarasvati* (August 2015): 29.
 <sup>199</sup> Leonhard Bartolomeus and Gesyada Annisa Namora Siregar (curators), *Lukisan Tanpa Teori (Nashar, Oesman Effendi, Rusli, Zaini)*, (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta: 8-23 November 2017).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>200</sup> Aminudin TH Siregar, "Mazhab Estetika Seniman Minang di Indonesia," *Sarasvati* (August 2015): 28-31.

for the People's Culture), that was associated with Indonesia's communist party. Clarifying key reference points sets the stage for the second section of this chapter, which focuses on the ways in which Jakarta shaped the activities of Nashar. This discussion is significant for an analysis of Angkatan 45 (the Generation of 1945), a reference that is used to describe writers who wrote their debut works during the revolutionary era. The fact that Nashar was in close contact with individuals including the poet Chairil Anwar who is associated with Angkatan 45 suggests that there was significant cross-sector discourse for creative producers in Jakarta in the decades after independence. For Nashar, this cross-sector discourse contributed to his own orientation as an advocate of artistic autonomy. It also shaped his self-positioning as a suffering artist (*pelukis penderita*). I will show that this persona is significant because it contributed to the formulation of his Three-Nons. Nashar was driven by the imperative to understand the human condition. He was pushed by Chairil Anwar not just to experience suffering but to truly understand it. In doing so he was able to arrive at realizations concerning what makes a great artist. After 1965, Jakarta's cultural milieu underwent significant changes because of the events surrounding G30S. In addition, new institutions were established that were integral to the activities of Jakarta's Minangkabau modernists. In the final three sections of this chapter, I shift to a consideration of how Nashar and OE specifically responded to this context. In 1973, Nashar formulated his Three-Nons. Months prior in 1972, OE returned to West Sumatra after which his work demonstrated a stylistic shift. In both instances, the work of these artists moved away from representational forms. Before he acted on what had been a long-held desire to *mudik* or return to his village of birth in West Sumatra OE delivered a speech at Taman Ismail Marzuki in 1969 that elicited significant backlash. This backlash arose from OE's pronouncement that Indonesian art was "still in the making." I engage with this speech to show that OE was committed to what he saw as the possibilities inherent in regional cultures for the development of Indonesian art. By looking at Nashar and OE in tandem, I also trace the relationship of each to Minangkabau. Specifically, I highlight Nashar's attention to alam both in his art and as a pedagogical tool. In doing so, I argue that after 1965 when these artists were finally free to express themselves fully it was through alam and an attention to their regional origins that they sought inspiration in their art. This chapter builds on my discussion in chapter one in that it shows how Minangkabau-born artists engage with their sociopolitical contexts in subtle ways. Both Nashar and OE are recognized for their production of paintings dominated by non-representational forms. However, as uncovered through their writings, they were intimately aware of and actively involved in debates concerning the best direction for Indonesian art and culture in the post-independence period.

## Politics and Culture, 1950 - 1966

The period following Indonesia's recognized independence, ca, 1950–65, has primarily been discussed in relation to its tragic endpoint, namely the events surrounding G30S, which resulted in the elimination of Indonesia's communist party and the subsequent mass killings of suspected communist sympathizers in 1966–68.<sup>201</sup> Leading up to this point, the interests of the Left

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>201</sup> Jennifer Lindsay, "Heirs to World Culture 1950-1965: An Introduction," in *Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian 1950-1965*, ed. Jennifer Lindsay and Maya H.T. Liem (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2012), 4. For more on the events surrounding G30S and the communist massacres in Indonesia see Benedict Anderson, Ruth T. McVey, and Frederick P. Bunnell, *A Preliminary Analysis of the 1 October 1965 Coup in Indonesia*, (Ithaca: Modern Indonesia Project Cornell University, 1971).; John Roosa, *Buried Histories: The Anticommunist Massacres of 1965-1966 in Indonesia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020).; John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30<sup>th</sup> Movement and Subarto's Coup d'Etat in Indonesia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).; Robert Cribb, "Unresolved Problems in the Indonesian

increasingly dominated both political and social life as a result of shifts that occurred in President Sukarno's policies as well as the international climate of the Cold War. Following independence Indonesia functioned as a parliamentary democracy. However, with an increase in regional rebellion and a perceived inability of the central government to maintain control, Sukarno declared martial law in 1957. He further declared the need to establish a national council that would place greater decision-making power in his hands. This resulted in the implementation of a political system known as Guided Democracy (Demokrasi Terpimpin), which was in place from 1959 to 1966.

In 1959 Sukarno laid out the principles of Guided Democracy in a speech that came to be known as the "Political Manifesto" (*Manifesto Politik Republik Indonesia*), or Manipol. This speech contained short- and long-term goals, such as the satisfaction of "basic needs of the people" and "elimination of imperialism everywhere" as well as a demand for a "retooling" of all government agencies.<sup>202</sup> In 1960, shortly after the delivery of Manipol, Sukarno expanded the manifesto with five principles that became known as the acronym Usdek: a return to the 1945 Constitution (Undang-Undang 45); Indonesian Socialism (Sosialisme Indonesia); Guided Democracy (Demokrasi Terpimpim); Guided Economy (Ekonomi Terpimpim); and Indonesian identity (Kepribadian Indonesia). During the period of Guided Democracy, it was common practice to speak of Manipol-Usdek in conjunction with another acronym, Nasakom, which referred to the unity of the principal partisan political groups or the idea that nationalism (*nasionalisme*), religion (*agama*), and communism (*komunisme*) were in fact compatible with one another.<sup>203</sup> As a result of this orientation, the period of Guided Democracy engendered increased support of the Indonesian Communist Party, which was made visible through the promotion of its participation in state institutions.

Scholars generally define cultural production in this period by the juxtaposition between Lekra, the cultural organization that was associated with but never part of the Indonesian Communist Party, and artists that advocated for artistic autonomy. All the artists under consideration in this chapter (i.e., Nashar, OE, Rusli, and Zaini) ultimately aligned themselves with and advocated for artistic autonomy. This put them on the side of the "victors" after 1965.

In the lead up to 1965, life was marked by a certain level of terror, making it nearly impossible for those that opposed the Left to assert their views. As Nashar reflects in his memoir, "Lekra was incredibly aggressive."<sup>204</sup> Every day they attacked their opponents in mass media outlets. They accused them of being "stooges of American capitalism, anti-*rakyat* (people), anti-national, and responsible for poisoning society."<sup>205</sup> Nashar and OE could not publicly assert their views on politics and Lekra until after 1965. For instance, in 1969 OE delivered a speech during an arts festival at Jakarta's cultural center Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM), titled "*Seni Lukis di Indonesia Dulu dan Sekarang*" (Painting in Indonesia Then and Now), in which he expressed his thoughts on how politics had stifled the work of artists in Indonesia and, subsequently, the development of painting.<sup>206</sup> This speech will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. In reality, cultural producers who opposed Lekra did not simply stand by in the lead up to 1965. In August 1963, in response to the growing threat posed by the dominance of Indonesia's communist party and the strength of Lekra, a group of artists and cultural critics that opposed these groups published a

Killings of 1965-1966," Asian Survey 42, no. 4 (2002): 550-563.; Robert Cribb, "The Indonesian Massacres," in Century of Genocide: Critical Essays and Eyenitness Accounts (New York: Routledge, 2004), 233-262.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>202</sup> Justus M. van der Kroef, "An Indonesian Ideological Lexicon," Asian Survey 2, no. 5 (July 1962): 25-26.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>203</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>204</sup> Nashar, Nashar oleh Nashar, 184.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>206</sup> Oesman Effendi, "Seni Lukis di Indonesia Dulu dan Sekarang," in *Seni Lukis Indonesia Tidak Ada* (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2007), 14.

statement known as the Cultural Manifesto (*Manifes Kebudayaan*), or Manikebu for short.<sup>207</sup> Zaini was one of its key signatories, while Nashar informally pledged his support.

In contrast to the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, in Indonesia the strength of the Communist Party and the existence of Lekra did not result in an explicit aesthetic regime like the adherence to principles of socialist realism.<sup>208</sup> The Cultural Manifesto was not an attack on a particular style of expression but rather an ideological orientation. The rather short manifesto-not quite one-hundred words-was published in the literary magazine Sastra and the newspaper Berita Republik. It included an explanation and history of the events that led to its inception, and called for a national culture that would not prioritize a particular ideology but uphold the values of *Pancasila*, Indonesia's state motto that was popularized under Sukarno. The five principles that *Pancasila* is based on are the belief in the one and only God (*ketuhanan yang Maha Esa*); just and civilized humanity (kemanusiaan yang adil dan beradab); the unity of Indonesia (persatuan Indonesia); democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations among representatives (kerakyataan yang dipimpin oleh hikmat kebijaksanaan dalam permusyawaratan/perwaklian); and social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia (keadilan social bagi seluruh rakyat Indonesia). In this context, the Cultural Manifesto was viewed as an indirect attack on Lekra's slogan, "politik adalah panglima" (politics is the commander). It was also considered to be an attack on concepts like Manipol-Usdek and Nasakom that were popularized by Sukarno during the period of Guided Democracy, or the second half of his tenure from 1959 to 1966.

The Cultural Manifesto was met by a fierce counterattack from Lekra that led to a presidential decree in May 1964 that made the Cultural Manifesto illegal. The threat that the decree posed for advocates of the Cultural Manifesto was, however, short-lived. Just over a year and a half later, Indonesia's communist party and Lekra lost their legitimacy as a result of the 30<sup>th</sup> September Movement that began with the kidnapping and murder of six army generals and one lieutenant by members of the Indonesian military in the early morning hours of October 1, 1965. The exact motivations for and perpetrators responsible for G30S remain uncertain. Throughout the New Order regime (1966–98), blame was placed on the Indonesian Communist Party, who was said to have orchestrated these events in an effort to take control of the state. This accusation led to the demonization of the Communist Party, which was exacerbated throughout the New Order by the use of such references as G30S/PKI (Gerakan 30 September/Partai Koumnis Indonesia, 30th September Movement/Indonesian Communist Party) and the production and dissemination of propaganda like the film Treachery of G30S/PKI (Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI). From 1984 until the end of the New Order, this film was shown on state media and was required viewing in schools and political institutions.<sup>209</sup> Scholars have also advanced the view that G30S was an internal army affair led by junior officers who were unhappy with senior leadership.<sup>210</sup> Ultimately, the events that took place in the first days of October 1965 led to the removal of President Sukarno from power; the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>207</sup> In English the term "Manikebu" means "buffalo sperm." This abbreviation was applied to the Cultural Manifesto by members of Lekra and can thus, be seen as a pejorative reference.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>208</sup> Lekra's aesthetic orientation was influenced by top party leaders of the Indonesian Communist Party, particularly Lukman Njoto. In his study of Lekra, Keith Foulcher (1986) describes Njoto's interest in the work of Maxim Gorky and his definition of socialist realism. Further, he points to Njoto's 1951 writings as an important source for understanding Lekra's use of terms like "social realist" and "realism" in the production of "people-minded art" (23-24). To articulate Njoto's interest in realism and romanticism Foulcher states, "He [Njoto] suggested that the way forward lay in the fusion of the great traditions of critical realism and romanticism, towards an art which would not only expose the nature of present-day social reality (realism) but point towards a process of progressive revolutionary change (romanticism)" (23).
<sup>209</sup> Krishna Sen and David T. Hill, *Media, Culture, and Politics in Indonesia* (Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2006), 148.

Bunnell, A Preliminary Analysis of the 1 October 1965 Coup in Indonesia, (Ithaca: Modern Indonesia Project Cornell University, 1971).

ascent to power of the nation's second president, Suharto; the mass murder of between 500,000 and 2,000,0000 suspected communist sympathizers from 1966 to 1968; and "freedom" for those who advocated for artistic autonomy in the preceding decades to finally pursue their art.

For artists and cultural producers who were labelled supporters or members of Indonesia's communist party, the implications were dire. Whereas some artists were disappeared, others were sent to prison in places like Buru Island or forced to either quit their work as artists or alter their stylistic and thematic interests because of the label that had been applied to them. For instance, painter Amrus Natalsya (b. 1933) was imprisoned on Buru Island until 1973 because of his part in the formation of the Bumi Tarung sanggar as well as his involvement with Lekra.<sup>211</sup> Established in 1961 in Yogyakarta, Bumi Tarung utilized such Lekra strategies as the philosophy of "turun ke bawah," or "going down to the people."212 These strategies were part of Lekra's 1-5-1 principle. Art historian Simon Soon explains that the first principle was the idea that "politics is the commander" (politik adalah panglima). Under this were five "working conditions" including broadening and raising standards (meluas dan meninggi), possessing great ideological and artistic qualities (tinggi mutu ideology dan tinggi mutu artistik), connected to good tradition and a sense of the revolutionary past (tradisi baik dan kekinian revolusioner), unity of individual creativity and the wisdom of history (perpaduan kreativitas individual dan kearifan masa), and social realism and revolutionary romanticism (realisme social dan romantik revolusioner). This was achieved by "going down" (turun ke bawah) to the people.<sup>213</sup> "Going down to the people" manifests visually, for example, in Natalsya's painting of 1957, Kawan-Kawanku (My Comrades) (fig 2.3). In that painting, a group of semi-dejected men represent ordinary folk through their depiction as shirtless or wearing sarongs around their waists.

Not all founding members of Bumi Tarung were sent to Buru Island like Natalsya was. The artist Djoko Pekik (1937–2023) was subject to a short imprisonment, after which he was released and allowed to live as an "ordinary" citizen. Labeled as a communist supporter, Pekik could not produce art and instead earned a meager living as a tailor throughout Suharto's New Order.<sup>214</sup> It was only after the end of Suharto's reign, in 1998, that Pekik once again began to paint, creating works like *Go to Hell Crocodile* (**fig 2.4**). This large-scale painting from 2014 depicts a giant crocodile curled around a circular pit, in a menacing stance, facing an encroaching crowd. This painting is a direct commentary on the events that occurred in the early morning hours of October 1, 1965, when the generals and lieutenant who were murdered were disposed of in an abandoned well, known as "*lubang buaya*" (crocodile's pit), in a village on the outskirts of Jakarta near Halim Air Force Base.

While artists who had not affiliated themselves with either Indonesia's communist party or Lekra experienced greater freedoms than they had in the lead up to 1965, the period after 1998 was

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>211</sup> Buru Island is an island part of the Maluku Islands in eastern Indonesia. In the 1960s and 70s it was one of the primary sites of exile and imprisonment of political dissidents in particular, those accused of having communist affiliations and sympathies. It was largely uncultivated when the first prisoners arrived who were in turn, tasked with building their own accommodations and establishing crops. Novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer was on Buru Island from 1965–1979 during which he wrote a large part of his famous *Buru Quartet*. For more on Buru Island and the history of its prison see Ken Setiawan, "Remembering Suffering and Survival: Sites of Memory on Buru," in *The Indonesian Genocide of 1965. Palgrave Studies in the History of Genocide*, eds. Katharine McGregor, Jess Melvin, & Annie Pohlman (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 215-233.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>212</sup> Bumi Tarung was established in 1961 in Yogyakarta to help promote the principle of 1-5-1. Its members rejected abstraction and supported realism in their art. See Agung Sedayu (ed.), "Bumi Tarung Perupa Lekra," *Tempo* (October 1, 2013), <u>https://nasional.tempo.co/read/517974/bumi-tarung-perupa-lekra</u>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>213</sup> Simon Soon, "Engineering the Human Soul in 1950s Indonesia and Singapore," in *Art, Global Maoism, and the Chinese Cultural Revolution,* eds. Jacob Galimberti, Noemi de Haro Garcia, and Victoria H.F. Scott (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 53 – 66.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>214</sup> Soe Tjen Marching, *The End of Silence: Accounts of the 1965 Genocide in Indonesia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 42.

anything but free. Natalsya and Pekik's experiences underscore the fact that The New Order was marked by censorship and the control of cultural production. Such restrictions led to the production of art marked by an avoidance of sociopolitical issues in favor of abstraction and other non-representational modes of expression.<sup>215</sup> The next section situates the trajectory of Nashar and his Minangkabau compatriots in this sociopolitical milieu before and after 1965.

### Nashar: Early Life and Jakarta's Cultural Milieu

Nashar was born in 1928 in the coastal town of Pariaman, West Sumatra. Sometime in his youth he traveled to Java with his family. Like many Minangkabau, his father was a trader or salesman (*pedagang*) who sought his fortune beyond West Sumatra. As is reflected in Nashar's memoir, his homelife was not especially positive. His father had a temper, took a second wife, and did not treat Nashar's mother with love or respect. From a young age, it appears that Nashar felt restricted by his father's rules and thus sought experience, inspiration, and guidance beyond his family home.<sup>216</sup>

Based in Jakarta during the Japanese occupation (1942–45), Nashar was inspired by the work of Sudjojono and other senior artists. He was shaped by the climate of revolution and the spirit of nationalism that marked the mid-twentieth century. Like most artists in Indonesia who came of age at this time, Nashar did not receive formal training in an academy of art but was a product of the sanggar (artist association or workshop). When the first sanggar were established in the late 1930s, they were intended as spaces to fill a void that existed in the colonial art world, namely, a complete lack of sites where artists native to Indonesia could acquire knowledge of art and develop their skills as well as exhibit their work. During the revolutionary era (1945–49), sanggar became spaces where artists were able to contribute to the revolutionary struggle by producing posters in support of the revolution and documenting the struggles of guerilla fighters.<sup>217</sup> During this period a large portion of Jakarta's population, including many artists, retreated to the Republican-held territories in Central Java where they joined newly established sanggar, such as SIM (Seniman Indonesia Muda) and Pelukis Rakyat (People's Painters), which were each led by senior artists, including Sudjojono, Affandi (1907–90), and Hendra Gunawan (1918–83).<sup>218</sup> It is most likely that during this period and through these associations, Nashar, OE, Rusli, and Zaini met and began to form relationships with one another.<sup>219</sup>

Like Nasher, OE and Zaini were born in West Sumatra. They migrated to Java at various points as teenagers.<sup>220</sup> Rusli was born in North Sumatra. Unlike Nashar who was entirely self-taught, Rusli and Zaini received some formal training in art before joining the revolutionary sanggar. Rusli traveled to Rabindranath Tagore's famed Santiniketan in India in 1932. Zaini, the only one of Jakarta's Minangkabau modernists to study art in Minangkabau, was a student at INS Kayutanam in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>215</sup> For more on censorship during the New Order see Krishna Sen and David T. Hill, *Media, Culture and Politics in Indonesia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Philip Kitley, *Television, Nation, and Culture in Indonesia* (Athens: Ohio University Center for Indonesian Studies, 2000).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>216</sup> Nashar, Nashar oleh Nashar (Jogjakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 2002), 28 and 84-86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>217</sup> Helena Spanjaard, Artists and their Inspiration: A Guide through Indonesian Art History (1930-2015) (Volendam: LM Publishers, 2016), 31-40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>218</sup> Claire Holt, Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 200-205.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>219</sup> In chapter 3 of *Nashar oleh Nashar*, Nashar describes his time in the Republican held territories. In this chapter he references OE and Zaini, indicating that they were in contact with one another at this time.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>220</sup> OE came to Jakarta in 1935 when he was fourteen years old (Sulin 1973). Nashar followed his father to Bandung where he attended elementary school and later continued to Jakarta, placing him in Java sometime around 1934 (Wiratno 2010, 103). Zaini first set foot in Jakarta in 1939 when he was fourteen years old (Sinaga 2010, 90). It is not clear when Rusli traveled to Java, whether before or after he left for Santiniketan in 1932 when he was twenty years old.

West Sumatra.<sup>221</sup> Near the end of the revolutionary era, each of these artists made their way back to Jakarta, where they lived for much of the remainder of their lives.

As the capital of the Dutch East Indies and then an independent Indonesia, Jakarta has long been a center marked by cross-sector discourse. Despite such challenges as the destruction of essential infrastructure and limited access to material comforts during and after the revolution, Jakarta remained a meeting place for people and ideas. As historian Robert Cribb notes, Jakarta's cosmopolitan environment and density of intellectuals and creative producers contributed to the growth of some of the most outspoken voices of this era.<sup>222</sup> Nevertheless, until the late-1960s Jakarta also lacked significant arts infrastructure, in particular an art academy. In consequence, artists were dependent on other networks and types of institutions if they wanted to develop their art and careers. For Nashar, this meant that his network was not defined by the work of visual artists. Instead, leading up to 1965, it was heavily influenced by his interaction with writers.

Throughout his life Nashar held several short-lived jobs. In the early 1950s he worked for the Information Bureau of the Navy and a Dutch-owned advertising agency that was hired to fix the presidential palace.<sup>223</sup> A description of the latter in his memoir indicates that he struggled to keep any of these jobs. He did not like working under the direction of others and believed that having such jobs that paid very little got in the way of his ultimate goal to live fully as an artist. It was therefore a major milestone when, in the early 1950s, he was presented with the opportunity to create illustrations for the cultural magazine *Mimbar Indonesia* (Indonesia Rostrum), which was established in November 1947 in Jakarta.<sup>224</sup> This marked the first time that he earned money for his work as an artist.<sup>225</sup>

With no real market for the sale of large scale works like paintings, creating illustrations for cultural magazines was an important source of income for artists in the post-independence period. It was most common for artists to create drawings that were placed randomly throughout a publication.<sup>226</sup> Nashar, however, had a stroke of luck when he was hired by *Mimbar* to create drawings to accompany specific short stories and articles. When Nashar assumed his position with *Mimbar*, he took his task very seriously. Each drawing that he created corresponded with the contents of a given text. For example, he depicted objects central to a short story titled "Scissors" (*Gunting*) in a drawing at the top left of a foldout (**fig 2.5**) including actual scissors and fields in the drawing's background. This story tells the tale of a man who has lost everything because of a monetary policy put into place in March 1950 referred to as "Gunting Syafrudin" that was intended to alleviate Indonesia's economic burden immediately after independence. Part of this policy involved literally cutting money in half to reduce its value. While this policy is not referred to by

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>221</sup> INS Kayutanam was founded in Kayutanam, West Sumatra in 1926 by Muhammad Sjafei. Sjafei's goal was to provide a model of education alternative to colonial schools that would be open to all. Sjafei's biography as well as the pedagogical orientation and curriculum are discussed at length in chapter three.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>222</sup> Robert Cribb, "The Nationalist World of Occupied Jakarta, 1946-1949," in *From Batavia to Jakarta Indonesia's Capital* 1930s to 1980s, ed. Susan Abeyasekere (Monash: Monash University, 1985), 91-107.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>223</sup> In chapter 5 of *Nashar oleh Nashar*, Nashar discusses his experiences of holding these jobs and the feelings that arose. <sup>224</sup> A. Teeuw, *Modern Indonesian Literature I* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 115.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>225</sup> Nashar, Nashar oleh Nashar, 96-98.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>226</sup> Various news articles from this period underline the significance of drawings at this juncture in Indonesia's art historical development, raising questions as to whether such drawings should be called art. In one article the writer notes that drawings in periodicals rarely had a connection to content while also calling out how little artists were paid for their work (S.S.A., 1950). In another article black and white sketches are discussed as important precursors to the production of larger more serious works. Here Affandi's work is compared to the likes of Leondaro da Vinci (Majalah Merdeka). Most notably in relation to Nashar, an entire article is devoted to his conte paintings. This article opens with a statement regarding how artists in Europe use various media ranging from watercolor to pencil to raise the question whether conte drawings are somehow inferior to oil paintings (Sesangka, 1955).

name in this story, the events that lead to the protagonist's downfall point in this direction. By the time the story's narrator meets the protagonist who carries scissors with him wherever he goes, we learn that after selling his home and small plot of land used as a garden, an economic policy was put into place that decimated his net worth. This causes the protagonist to go mad. The message portrayed by this story is that ultimately, the nation the protagonist had fought for throughout the revolution had failed him. In the same foldout, there is a drawing on the right by OE that is reflective of the more random placement of drawings throughout such publications. The drawings published in *Mimbar* constitute some of the earliest examples of Nashar's visual art. While Nashar's drawings for *Mimbar* were a way for him to earn money, they also shed light on his engagement with politics. Through his association with *Mimbar*, Nashar was implicated in a network of individuals that were critically engaged with issues that the new nation faced as reflected by the plot line of "Scissors." He was also introduced to other cultural producers specifically the members of Angkatan 45 (the Generation of 1945). Nashar's orientation as an artist has clear parallels with Angkatan 45. A consideration of this distinction is thus notable for what it reveals about the context in which Nashar was shaped.

Angkatan 45 is often discussed in opposition to Indonesia's communist party and Lekra. These distinctions were not clear cut in the late-1940s, however. When the term "Angkatan 45" was first used at the end of 1948, it was used to refer to the writers who published their debut works during the Japanese occupation and the years of the national revolution.<sup>227</sup> It distinguished them from writers of the prewar period whose works were seen as insufficient for the new era.<sup>228</sup> Further, it aligned them with the *pemuda* (youth) that had fought in the armed struggle of the revolution, for which the term Angkatan 45 was also used.<sup>229</sup> Of Angkatan 45, literary historian A. Teeuw writes that these writers were no longer "passive onlookers" like the previous generation.<sup>230</sup> Rather, they were participants in world affairs shaped by external circumstances including revolution, guerilla warfare, imprisonment, and freedom from the chains of colonial oppression. This compelled them to live "intensely" and bear witness to this vehemence in and through their art.<sup>231</sup> The formulation of a statement in 1950 known as the Gelanggang Testimonial of Beliefs (*Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang*) encapsulated this sentiment and further contributed to the positioning of Angkatan 45.

The signatories of Gelanggang were a varied group that ultimately went in different ideological directions. However, Gelanggang is often associated with Angkatan 45 and is considered a precursor to the Cultural Manifesto that was published in 1963 in response to Lekra's strength at that time. In the words of literary historian Martina Heinschke, Gelanggang captured the sentiment that an artist must not be beholden to societal norms or external pressures like religious beliefs or political ideologies.<sup>232</sup> Further, the opening salvo of Gelanggang that read, "We are the true heirs of world culture," proclaimed independence from cultural nationalism and instead, emphasized the freedom of the artist to choose from among stimulating influences.<sup>233</sup> When Lekra was formed in 1950, it contributed to distinctions between ideological camps or the juxtaposition between artists who supported artistic autonomy versus artists who were committed to art as a political tool.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>227</sup> Martina Heinschke, "Between Gelanggang and Lekra: Pramoedya's Developing Literary Concepts," *Indonesia* 61 (1996): 147.; A. Teeuw (1979) writes that the term Angkatan 45 was first used by Rosihan Anwar in the periodical *Siasat* on January 9, 1949 (vol I, 122-123).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>228</sup> More specifically, Angkatan 45 saw themselves in contrast to those writers who had been associated with the magazine, *Pudjangga Baru* (The New Poet), published under *Balai Pustaka* starting in 1933.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>229</sup> Martina Heinschke, "Between Gelanggang and Lekra: Pramoedya's Developing Literary Concepts," 148.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>230</sup> A. Teeuw, Modern Indonesian Literature I, 124.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>231</sup> Ibid., 125.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>232</sup> Martina Heinschke, "Between Gelanggang and Lekra: Pramoedya's Developing Literary Concepts," 150.
 <sup>233</sup> Ibid.

Nashar's connection to Angkatan 45 by way of his employment with *Mimbar* came through an introduction made by painter Basuki Resobowo (1916–99) to one of the magazine's editors, H.B. Jassin (1917–2000).<sup>234</sup> Notably, Resobowo was the head of Lekra's visual art department.<sup>235</sup> He also ran for a legislative seat as a member of Indonesia's communist party. H.B. Jassin was a novelist and is recognized as part of Angkatan 45. He was also a staunch advocate of artistic autonomy and played a key role in the formulation of both Gelanggang and the Cultural Manifesto. This overlap between ideological camps underscores the reality that Nashar was aware of contrasting viewpoints and affiliations. In fact, this is something he prized and sought to ensure younger artists were also aware of as is evidenced by an anecdote in his memoir that describes his involvement with Organisasi Seniman Indonesia (Organization of Indonesian Artists, OSI), a sanggar that he was a part of in Jakarta.<sup>236</sup> As a senior member of OSI Nashar sought to ensure that younger artist members were able to make their own ideological choices. To do this, he advocated for a diversity of viewpoints when speakers were invited to visit OSI specifically, members of Lekra. His hope was that this would show the members of OSI that this organization was freer than Lekra that dictated the actions and activities of its members.<sup>237</sup>

To date, no sustained attention has been paid to the relationship of writers affiliated with Angkatan 45 and visual artists during the contested period from 1950 to 1965. Indonesian art history has long been driven by the study of professional art institutions. However, because there was no formal art academy until 1970, the actors under consideration in this chapter fall out of such institutional confines. Visual artists like Nashar, OE, Rusli, and Zaini were influenced by other networks and institutions in Jakarta. This cross-sector discourse among Jakarta's Minangkabau literary and visual modernists is comparable to the "intermedial connections" in Cambodia that existed prior to the takeover by the Khmer Rouge in 1975 that art historian Roger Nelson has discussed.<sup>238</sup> In both cases, cross-sector discourse contributed to a "creative dynamism" that otherwise would not have been possible. For Nashar specifically, it played an integral part in his ideological orientation or support for artistic autonomy. It also contributed to his own self-fashioning as a "suffering artist" *(pelukis penderita)*, an archetype of Angkatan 45 that correlates directly with the posthumous distinction of poet Chairil Anwar (1922–49). Chairil Anwar was the posterchild of this generation because he embodied the intensity that Angkatan 45 espoused in their writing in the way that he lived as an irregular and arrogant eccentric during his short life.<sup>239</sup>

Nashar's lifestyle choices including his decision to remain destitute rather than seek stable employment and his preference for sleeping on the floor at Balai Budaya were active choices that parallel Chairil Anwar's lifestyle. Nashar met Anwar in Jakarta sometime at the end of the revolution. Anwar who was born in Medan, North Sumatra in 1922 to a Minangkabau family died in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>234</sup>Nashar discusses his introduction to H.B. Jassin and experience working with *Mimbar* in chapter 6 of *Nashar oleh Nashar*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>235</sup> Umi Lestari, "Basuki Resobowo as a Jack of All Trades: The Intersectionality of Arts and Film in Perfini Films and Resobowo's Legacy in Indonesian Cinema," *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 4, no. 2 (October 2020): 314.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>236</sup> OSI was founded at Balai Budaya in the late-1950s. Nashar was one of its leaders. Its goal was to foster individualism. The idea for OSI grew out of the painting lessons that Nashar along with OE and Zaini led at Balai Budaya. OSI also had a film club that was led by Arief Budiman (Soe Hok Djin). Speakers that were invited to OSI included Basuki Resobowo (affiliated with Lekra) and Sitor Situmorang (affiliated with Lembaga Kebudayaan Nasional, LKN). Nashar describes OSI's activities in chapter five of his memoir.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>237</sup> Nashar, Nashar oleh Nashar, 190.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>238</sup> Roger Nelson, "The Work the Nation Depends On': Landscapes and Women in the Paintings of Nhek Dim," in *Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art, 1945 – 1990*, eds. Stephen H. Whiteman et al. (Power Publicatins and National Gallery Singapore, 2018), 19 – 48.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>239</sup> See H.B. Jassin, *Chairil Annuar Pelopor Angkatan* 45 (Jakarta: Media Pressindo, 2018).

1949 at the age of twenty-two after a bout of illness. As one source notes, Anwar migrated to Jakarta at the beginning of 1940 in part, because of his hatred for his father.<sup>240</sup> In Jakarta Anwar did not have a fixed address. He moved between social circles and slept in sites ranging from the homes of leading figures like Hatta and Sjahrir, the nation's first vice-president and prime minister respectively, to river embankments under bridges alongside members of Jakarta's underclass.<sup>241</sup> Anwar's earliest poem is dated October 1942, just six months after the start of the Japanese occupation.<sup>242</sup> During Indonesia's revolution he fought alongside republican forces. He was married briefly and had a daughter, however, like Nashar, domestic life did not appeal to him.<sup>243</sup> Anwar's association with Angkatan 45 has been attributed to the way that he lived as an irregular and arrogant eccentric during his short life and the fact that his writing was marked by an "obsessional vitality" or life force.<sup>244</sup> In his memoir Nashar directly credits Anwar, along with the painter Affandi, as having the greatest impact on his outlook as an artist. An early aesthetic affinity between Nashar's work and that of Affandi is visible in a painting from 1957 titled Di Pekarangan Rumah (In the Yard) (fig 2.6). Like Affandi's signature style that is characterized by bold brushwork and vibrant colors as demonstrated in this painting titled Cockfight Gambler (fig 2.7), Nashar's more realistic rendition of a chicken is marked by swirling brushstrokes that result in an expressionistic composition. The influence of Affandi and Anwar on Nashar's work is best reflected in the intensity with which Nashar studied the world around him. Affandi instructed him to paint continuously and Chairil Anwar urged him to truly understand the human condition.<sup>245</sup> Each of these imperatives would later contribute to Nashar's formulation of his Three-Nons. As Nashar recorded in his memoir:

There are a few things about Chairil Anwar that really determined my attitude about painting. As usual, we often went for walks together or drank coffee at roadside stalls. My sketchbook never left my hand, always ready to depict objects that pleased me. One day after I completed a sketch ... Chairil Anwar stated the following ... "Nas, I see that you diligently make sketches of human life focused primarily on those who are suffering and destitute. From your sketches I can tell that you do *feel* this suffering. However, in my opinion *feeling* is not enough. Have you tried to really delve into and understand the suffering that these souls experience?" This question troubled me a great deal. For a week I had difficulty sleeping and could not paint. This simple question caused me to examine myself and why I wanted to be a painter.<sup>246</sup>

At the heart of this statement is an existential crisis brought on by Chairil Anwar's provocation. Nashar realizes that what matters is not just the subject that one depicts. How the artist comes to understand the essence of what they depict through their own experiences defines their purpose.

For artists who advocated for artistic autonomy after Indonesia's recognized independence understanding the human condition of which suffering was a part was not a means to an end but an ongoing process. According to writer and cultural critic Goenawan Mohamad, who was a signatory of the Cultural Manifesto, while Lekra and its opponents were both concerned with the suffering of the masses, they differed in how "authentic" or "genuine" their efforts and subsequently products

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>240</sup> Boen Sri Oemarjati, Chairil Anwar: The Poet and His Language (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), xx.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>241</sup> Ibid., xxi.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>242</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>243</sup> Ibid., xxii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>244</sup> A. Teeuw, Modern Indonesian Literature I, 125.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>245</sup> For reflections on Affandi's influence and how he urged his students to paint continuously see *Nashar oleh Nashar*, 64-65.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>246</sup> Nashar, Nashar oleh Nashar, 65-66.

were.<sup>247</sup> Here Goenawan Mohamad's assertion can be read as a critique of Lekra. By serving a "larger machine," namely Indonesia's communist party it was not possible for the work of these artists to be either genuine or authentic.<sup>248</sup>

Today, Chairil Anwar is a national hero, recognized for the impact he left on Indonesian literature and cultural expression. His eccentric character that has parallels with Nashar's own persona did elicit backlash, however. This is exemplified by the novel Atheis (The Atheist). Written in 1949 by Indonesian novelist Achdiat K. Mihardja, Atheis tells the story of a young man named Hasan. One of its central characters is a young anarcho-nihlist artist named Anwar. His character is described as "destructive, egoistic, and vain" and is believed to be based on Chairil Anwar.<sup>249</sup> Born in a rural village in West Java, Hasan is raised in a conservative Islamic environment and grows up under the influence of religious teachings and traditions. However, as he moves to the city for his education, he becomes exposed to a different intellectual and cultural milieu through his acquaintance with characters including Anwar who serves as his alter-ego. Atheis is set against the backdrop of a changing Indonesian society, with political and social upheavals shaping the narrative. Hasan explores his internal conflicts as he navigates between the conservative religious values of his upbringing and the secular, often atheistic, perspectives he counters in the city. Ultimately, Anwar is key to Hasan's downfall. As he grapples with the concept of atheism, significant strife arises between Hasan and his family. And because of Anwar's womanizing behavior and advances towards Kartini, Hasan's wife, the two divorce. When Atheis was published it incited significant discussion because of its attention to various ideological streams including Marixist-Lenisim, anarcho-nihilism, and Islam. Literary historian Hendrik M.J. Maier positions its author, Mihardja as a member of the "old guard" or the generation that preceded Angkatan 45. If we take the assertation that Anwar is modeled after Chairil Anwar at face value, his negative portraval is notable for how a rejection of traditional values and religious beliefs were received by society. However, this also appears to be central to the goals of Angkatan 45 or writers and artists like Chairil Anwar and Nashar. By embracing competing influences, they sought to achieve greatness through their art by living fully in and through their creative endeavors.

Jakarta's cosmopolitan milieu that brought Nashar into contact with figures ranging from the writers associated with Angkatan 45 such as Chairil Anwar to members of Indonesia's communist party affiliated with Lekra was integral to his outlook as an artist. Like Hasan in *Atheis*, he actively grappled with different viewpoints that in turn, contributed to his "adat berkarya" (customary practice of making). Jakarta was only one contributing factor that shaped his "alam" or universe, however. Nashar was a veracious reader familiar with writers including Rabindranath Tagore and Fyodor Dostoevsky.<sup>250</sup> He also familiarized himself with the work of foreign painters not least, Vincent Van Gogh. Throughout his memoir Nashar asks whether it is necessary to live like Van Gogh if an artist wishes to achieve greatness. Van Gogh was born into an upper-middle class family; however, he chose to leave the comforts of his position and serve the lower classes as a missionary before he returned to and achieved greatness in his art. Notably, like Nashar both Chairil Anwar and Van Gogh were migrants. This raises interesting questions regarding Nashar's admiration for these figures. Like Nashar they left what was familiar with a desire to learn about the world and achieve

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>247</sup> Goenawan Mohammad, *The 'Cultural Manifesto' Affair Revisited: Literature and Politics in Indonesia in the 1960s, a Signatory's View*, ed. and trans. Harry Aveling (Victoria: Monash University, 2011), 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>248</sup> Ibid.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>249</sup> Hendrik M.J. Maier, "I Felt Like a Car Without a Driver': Achidat K. Mihardja's Novel Atheis," in *Identity in Asian Literature*, ed. Lisbeth Littrup (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 131.
 <sup>250</sup> Jeffrey Hadler, Personal Archive, 3.

things that were not possible if they had stayed put. Their experience as migrants was integral to their position as great artists.

Jakarta's cultural milieu underwent significant changes after 1965. Not least, because a substantial portion of the city's artists and intellectuals had been silenced due to the events surrounding G30S. Nashar makes explicit his feelings against Lekra and Indonesia's communist party in his memoir.<sup>251</sup> The sentiment that marks his writing after 1970, however, points to a reality whereby new limitations had emerged that created turmoil for Nashar. Specifically, a lack of interlocutors such that had inspired his thinking during the revolutionary era and throughout the first decade of Indonesia's independence. In this context, Surat-Surat Malam specifically reflects what was Nashar's own strategies for confronting the reality of new restrictions placed on both creative producers and the general populace under Suharto's New Order. Nevertheless, after 1965, there were positive developments for creative producers in Jakarta that had a notable impact on the opportunities afforded to Nashar and his compatriots and subsequently the development of their art. In 1968, Jakarta's cultural complex Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM) opened and in 1970, Jakarta's Art Institute was founded. All four of Jakarta's Minangkabau modernists played a part in these institutions and frequently showed their work at TIM's gallery. In the next three sections I shift to a more explicit engagement with Nahsar's Three-Nons and his relationship to his Minangkabau compatriots. In doing so, I also highlight what in the early-1970s was a shift in OE's stylistic orientation that resulted from a trip to West Sumatra. By looking at these examples in tandem, I consider how a relationship to Minangkabau can be traced in their thinking and subsequently, making that is inseparable on the one hand from the idea that "nature acts as our teacher" and on the other hand, the portrayal of alam's intangible manifestations.

#### Nashar's Three-Nons

Throughout the 1970s Nashar wrote a sizeable number of letters, most of which he addressed to an unnamed *kawan* (friend or comrade). Several of these letters were published as focused statements. For example, *"Surat Kepada Seorang Pelukis"* (Letter to a Painter) and *"Surat Kepada Seorang Aktor"* (Letter to an Actor) were published in the literary magazine *Horison.*<sup>252</sup> Fifteen of his letters were published as an extended narrative in a collection titled *Surat-Surat Malam.*<sup>253</sup> Nashar frequently references Van Gogh as a key inspiration for why he chose letters as a key mode of address.<sup>254</sup> Van Gogh wrote letters to his brother Theo that were collected in a volume.<sup>255</sup> Nashar encountered this volume in Dutch at the STICUSA library in Jakarta.<sup>256</sup> Nashar laments that he is jealous of Van

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>251</sup> In chapter 11 of *Nashar oleh Nashar*, Nashar describes the publication of the Cultural Manifesto. He places emphasis on the excitement and hope that he felt when this document was issued. To help promote awareness of its existence he quickly left Jakarta, traveling to Java to help promote it.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>252</sup> For an analysis of Nashar's "Letter to an Actor" see, Katherine Bruhn, "Surat Kepada Seorang Aktor – "Letter to an Actor": Interpreting Nashar's "Letter to an Actor," Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia 6, no. 2 (October 2022): 165-170. For a translation of this letter see, Elly Kent (trans.), "Letter to an Actor," Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia 6, no. 2 (October 2022): 165-170. For a translation of this letter see, Elly Kent (trans.), "Letter to an Actor," Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia 6, no. 2 (October 2022): 171-179.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>253</sup> These letters were published in the July-August 1976 edition of *Horison*. The latter, "*Surat Kepada Seorang Aktor*" was translated to English in 2022 for a special edition of the journal *Southeast of Now: Directions in Modern and Contemporary Art in Asia* focused on experimentation in the development of modernism in Southeast Asia. Along with this translation an introduction was written that explores the impact that playwright Putu Wijaya had on Nashar (Bruhn 2022). <sup>254</sup> Nashar, *Nashar oleh Nashar*, 91.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>255</sup> Van Gogh's letters were first published in 1914.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>256</sup> Ibid., 88.; STICUSA was founded in 1948. It was a foundation for cultural co-operation between the Netherlands, Indonesia, and the Dutch colonies in the West (Surinam and the Antilles). Its goal was to promote harmony between

Gogh because he had a constant interlocutor. This jealousy might be read as a reflection of Nashar's position as a migrant. He not only left his parents' home but also a home with his wife and children. In this sense he was a double migrant. He resisted domestic life yet, perhaps he longed for family members that he could relate to like Van Gogh and Theo. This jealousy was also connected to the conditions that marked Indonesia's art world after 1965. In his memoir Nashar states that there was no longer anyone to talk about politics and life with. Instead, art was the only topic that occupied conversations.<sup>257</sup> The ability to engage with different viewpoints was central to his experience in Jakarta in the post-independence period as explained in the previous section. Without a diversity of interlocutors, Nashar's letters served as a space for him to voice his ideas and viewpoints on life and art.

Nashar developed his idea of Three-Nons for the first time in a letter. The letter is one of three published in 1973 in an exhibition catalogue that accompanied a solo exhibition featuring forty of his acrylic paintings at TIM. The first two letters in the catalogue are addressed to an unnamed *kawan* and signed with a note that their contents are taken from his daily notes. The third letter, in which he introduces the concept of the Three-Nons, was written anew for the exhibition and addressed to Zaini, one of his Minangkabau compatriots. Nashar's decision to address this letter to a specific recipient is a rarity. Because of this it underscores his respect for Zaini. It also points to the part that the other Minangkabau modernists played in the formulation of his Three-Nons precisely because they shared a similar approach to art making. In his memoir Nashar underscores this by clarifying exactly why he needed to address his 1973 letter to Zaini:

From what I painted in Bali, I was most interested in Zaini's criticism. In conversation he asked me, "Are the contours (edges on each object) in your paintings from Bali really necessary? I have known Zaini for a long time, I know him well so I understand his question. He believes these contours are unnecessary. You need to know that Zaini is the most sensitive and attentive person when looking at paintings. Because of this his critique really caught my attention. However, it is also hard for me to explain myself. I must think back to the experience of painting each painting in question. Most people would think that Zaini's criticism is associated with technique. This is not what he meant. What he wanted to know is what was going on inside of me that made me feel like I needed these contours.<sup>258</sup>

The last three sentences of this excerpt are noteworthy because they place emphasis on what for both Nashar and Zaini was a kind of internal force that in turn, informed their manifestation of a painting's technical components like line or contour. This calls to mind Aminudin TH Siregar's description of the Jakarta Minangkabau modernists referenced in this chapter's introduction. In Siregar's words, the work of these artists demonstrates an interest in "realities of the inner realm" (*kenyataan-kenyataan dari wilayah dalam*) and are marked by a tendency to "dig into the subconscious mind, bring to the fore hypnotic potential on the surface of the canvas, reveal 'essential' forms, and provide an impression of the artist's situation of solitude (and in some cases, psychotic tendencies)."<sup>259</sup> Siregar does not refer to alam explicitly in his description of these artists' work. However, his references including "realities of the inner realm" and "subconscious mind" parallel

these regions and contribute to contact with Western culture, specifically Dutch culture, abroad. For more on STICUSA see, Lisbeth Dolk, "An Entangled Affair: STICUSA and Indonesia, 1948-1956," in *Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian* 1950-1965, eds. Jennifer Lindsay and Maya H.T. Liem (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2012), 57-74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>257</sup> Nashar, "Surat Kedua," in *Tiga Pucuk Surat Pelukis Nashar* (Exhibition at Pusat Kesenian Jakarta, February 22-28, 1973).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>258</sup> Nashar, Nashar oleh Nashar, 179.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>259</sup> Aminudin TH Siregar, "Mazhab Estetika Seniman Minang di Indonesia," Sarasvati (August 2015): 29.

alam's translation as "realms of perception." For Nashar, "digging into the subconscious mind" to "reveal 'essential forms" or tapping into and portraying alam was neither straightforward nor immediate.

In his letter to Zaini Nashar describes the Three-Nons and lays out three distinct periods that were central to his realization of this unique approach to art making: a year he spent in Bali in 1958, six months in 1964, and the period from 1968 until 1973 when he wrote the letter. He reports that between each of these formative periods, he was in a "state of uncertainty."<sup>260</sup> Nashar includes an extended reflection on the first period or his 1958 trip to Bali in his memoir in which he highlights two key incidents. These incidents are noteworthy because they emphasize how Nashar's focus on suffering and his attention to and desire to understand alam informed the development of his Three-Nons.

Nashar traveled to Bali numerous times throughout his life. During these trips he spent extended periods living amongst Balinese villagers in the area of Ubud. Located in the uplands of Bali, Ubud has long been recognized as a center for traditional crafts, performing arts, and modern painting. The landscape of Ubud is marked by rainforests and terraced ride paddies dotted with Hindu-Balinese temples and shrines. Throughout history, the beauty and character of this region has attracted foreign and domestic artists alike. This is despite the fact that well into the 1950s, it was a relatively impoverished area.<sup>261</sup> Nashar details in his memoir how many homes did not have a water pump to shower or a toilet, and many of the residents in the villages surrounding Ubud worked as farmers on rented land.<sup>262</sup> They often did not have enough to eat or were forced to eat undesirable food crops like yams.<sup>263</sup> Despite such hardship, Nashar was welcomed with open arms. He experienced first-hand the suffering that Balinese villagers were forced to endure while also learning about Balinese culture.

Nashar's experience in Ubud was an opportunity to not just feel but to understand suffering. It also contributed to his perception of what makes great art. He was not bothered by what he encountered in Bali or the fact that he himself was forced to endure Bali's impoverished conditions, instead, it led him to question how an area like Ubud specifically and Bali more generally could produce so many artists. He arrived at his answer through an encounter with a nine-year-old dancer. As he explains in his memoir, one evening he was observing one of the dancers preparing her costume while waiting for a dance performance to begin, when suddenly a gong part of the gamelan ensemble was struck.<sup>264</sup> Without thinking, the dancer moved her body perfectly in tune with the music. Amazed by the skill of this dancer, Nashar sought out her family after the performance to get to know them and to try to understand how this young girl had already achieved this level of ability. He learned that before any performance, the young girl asked for and ate quantities of fruit that were much too large for someone of her stature. This fruit was not for the girl but rather the Gods who entered her body during the performance.<sup>265</sup> For Nashar, this indicated that life and art in Bali were not separate. This encounter underscored Nashar's realization that "without a strong belief in something, an artist will easily falter in the face of life, their actions will become exaggerated or extravagant, including their art."266 Nevertheless, as he continued, "it is difficult to discuss this, let alone debate it because this issue rests deep in one's heart and is not a visual matter."<sup>267</sup> From this

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>260</sup>Nashar, "Surat Ketiga," in Tiga Pucuk Surat Pelukis Nashar.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>261</sup> Nashar, Nashar oleh Nashar, 147-148

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>262</sup> Ibid., 148-149.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>263</sup> Ibid., 149-150.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>264</sup> Ibid., 157-159.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>265</sup> Ibid., 158

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>266</sup> Ibid., 160

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>267</sup> Ibid.

encounter he arrived at his definition of what in his 1973 letter he refers to as "*sesuatu*" (something). Where "sesuatu" was for him what was conveyed through his Three-Nons. He defined this "sesuatu" as "a feeling deep in your heart that cannot be expressed with words. It can only be felt, and only by those who are sensitive to it."<sup>268</sup> In the excerpt from his memoir that explains why he felt compelled to address his 1973 letter to Zaini, it is this "sesuatu" that Zaini was trying to understand.

The second incident that occurred in Bali was connected to Nashar's observation of alam. This incident caused him to question the academic conventions of painting. In other words, it can be said to have contributed to his move away from technique. From the moment that Nashar arrived in Bali he was struck by the number of dogs and pigs that he encountered. Because the population in Java is predominantly Muslim, pigs are considered haram and therefore a rare sight. In Bali, where the population is predominantly Hindu, these animals are pervasive and, as Nashar explains, exist in a kind of symbiotic relationship with humans. Because there were no toilets in the houses where he stayed in Ubud and because the water in the nearby rivers was considered sacred, the villagers defecated in the pig pens. Their waste was then eaten by the dogs and pigs.<sup>269</sup> From his first days in Bali, Nashar was fascinated by these animals. Through his observation of pigs, he arrived at a realization regarding the incompatibility of the term "komposisi" (composition) with naturally occurring phenomena. On one occasion he tried to paint the way that pigs huddle together in the corner of their pens. However, he quickly became frustrated because it was impossible to create a balanced composition according to academic principles.<sup>270</sup> This raised the question: if nature is balanced, then why does it become imbalanced when painted? Nashar explains that the pig demonstrates a "natural balance" that is not visible to the human eye.<sup>271</sup> Specifically, despite its giant, fat body, a pig can stand atop four tiny legs and still somehow have significant amounts of energy.<sup>272</sup> According to his self-narrative, after this experience Nashar no longer paid heed to academic principles. Instead, he looked at his compositions the way that he looked at nature; that is, he considered the most important aspect of a work to be whether a "sesuatu" emerged.

Each of these incidents demonstrates Nashar's adat berkarya. He began from an observable phenomenon including the dancing girl and pigs huddling in a pen. He then sought to understand specific aspects of each phenomenon that raised questions of a diverse nature. What makes a great artist? Why is it difficult to depict something that happens in nature if an artist remains true to academic conventions? When he arrived at an answer to each question it was because he had conveyed "sesuatu" on canvas. Namely, "a feeling deep in [his] heart that [could] not be expressed with words. It [could] only be felt, and only by those who [were] sensitive to it.<sup>273</sup> In the letter addressed to Zaini that was published in the 1973 exhibition catalogue Nashar further clarifies the process with which he approached his production of paintings that were a product of his Three-Nons highlighting how he was able to convey this "sesuatu":

I start by scribbling something. At the outset I have absolutely no idea what I am trying to achieve. Nor do I try to plan what I want to achieve. From this initial doodle I see numerous possibilities that I could develop. In the second stage, I pick one of these possibilities. In the third stage, again, I pick another possibility. And so on. In my opinion, to be able to see the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>268</sup> Nashar, Nashar oleh Nashar, 135.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>269</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>270</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>271</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>272</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>273</sup> Ibid., 135.

various possibilities and choose one among them requires extreme vigilance and sharp intuition ... Eventually, "something" (*sesuatu*) emanates from the painting ... When this happens, I consider a painting finished and sign my name to it.<sup>274</sup>

Nashar's description calls to mind the process of other Minangkabau-born artists like the members of Jendela discussed in chapter one. It is neither passive nor inevitable. Rather, it is rooted in a process that necessitates focus or what Nashar asserts is "extreme vigilance" and "sharp intuition." Notably, as part of his signature, or the act that signified he had successfully conveyed "sesuatu" in a painting, Nashar built a "monogrammatic house" (fig 2.8). Jeffrey Hadler suggests that this house represented Nashar's "inversion of matrilocality."<sup>275</sup> In other words, within his paintings, Nashar created a home for himself. This house did not have a gonjong roof like those found on rumah gadang (matrifocal longhouse) that would have situated it in Minangkabau. However, the process that led to its formation appears to have had a direct connection to Minangkabau. This process was not only informed by his relationship with other Minangkabau-born artists but also, his awareness of and attention to alam that is further emphasized by looking at Nashar's pedagogical orientation. However, before doing so, I will examine how Nashar's search for "sesuatu" contributed to his steady move away from representational forms. As noted, the formulation of Nashar's Three-Nons was neither straightforward nor immediate. This is demonstrated by a consideration of several paintings created between 1964 and 1977. The first three paintings were created in 1964 and reflect what was likely the period of uncertainty that marked this year. The rest of the paintings were created in 1972 and 1977 respectively. This time span situates them in the third period that Nashar identifies as central to the formulation of his Three-Nons.

Three paintings from 1964 titled Anak (Child) (fig 2.9), Ibu dan Tiga Anaknya (Mother and her Three Children) (fig 2.10), and Kasih Ibu (Mother's Love) (fig 2.11) demonstrate that Nashar's work was not always defined by its abstraction. These paintings are also rare surviving examples from Nashar's early artistic development. Each painting depicts a figure or several figures. Anak portrays a young boy wearing black coveralls and no shirt. His lips are pursed, and his brows furrowed. He stares directly at the viewer. Ibu dan Tiga Anaknya portrays a woman lying on her side on a bench. Three children are seated in front of her including two younger boys and a baby. In Kasih Ibu, a mother is nursing her child as she stares off into the distance. The mother's attire and the simple wooden structure that serves as the backdrop in Kasih Ibu calls to mind the kind of structures found in Jakarta's kampung (literally, village), or slums such that Nashar and his family lived in according to a letter in Surat-Surat Malam.<sup>276</sup> There is a tension in these paintings. The same expression marks the face of the boy in Anak and the eldest child in Ibu dan Tiga Anaknya. He is not happy. There is no sense of joy on his face. This persists in the mother's face. She refuses to meet the painter's gaze. She is despondent. Each of these paintings is significant because they demonstrate Nashar's attention to concept, technique, and form. Each figure is portrayed realistically. Their position within the composition is labelled. Further, each painting has a clear concept that is inseparable from the subject portrayed. Each figure is shaded. Nashar's palette is neutral. In each painting, the colors complement one another. Elements like the bench that the mother lies on in *Ibu* dan Tiga Anaknya and the bed in the room behind her in Kasih Ibu create a sense of space. In short, each of these three paintings is marked by a desire to achieve a balanced composition that follows academic conventions.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>274</sup> Nashar, "Surat Ketiga," in Tiga Pucuk Surat Pelukis Nashar.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>275</sup> Jeffrey A. Hadler, "Night Letters: The Ambiguous Archive of Soeharto's New Order (1968 – 1977)," 55.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>276</sup> Nashar, *Surat-Surat Malam* (Jogjakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 2002), 229.

By 1972, Nashar's attention to academic realism appears to have dissipated when he created Tetangga (Neighbor) (fig 2.12), Parangtritis (fig 2.13), and Sebelum Ngaben (Before Ngaben) (fig 2.14). While certain forms are still discernible, each painting is marked by a level of abstraction that challenges the viewer's perception. In Tetangga, a large swathe of orange from the painting's background merges into the body of the figure. In Sebelum Ngaben, heads of animals discernible on the left likely reference the coffins (bade) used in the Balinese cremation ceremony (ngaben). These figures are overwhelmed by the juxtaposition of blues, blacks, and greens that effectively divide the canvas into two. The title of Parangtritis refers to a beach located south of Yogyakarta on Java's coast. The viewer encounters the most extreme level of abstraction in that painting. It is not clear what the three rows of yellow undulating shapes marked with orange zig zags are intended to represent. The colors are like that of sand, but set against a dark brown backdrop, they do not reference the water or waves that this coastline is known for. The division of each row pierced by what could be a ship's mast suggests the traditional fishing boats that Nashar frequently cites in his memoir and Surat-Surat Malam. The recognizable forms in each of these paintings suggests a reference point or subject that in turn, informed each painting's concept. However, none of these paintings is marked by a desire to portray an exact likeness of the subject at hand. Instead, they reveal Nashar's attempt to capture something that is beyond our immediate comprehension by disregarding technical components like line or contour that contributed to the realism and balance in his earlier works like those from 1964.

In 1977, when *Larut Malam* (fig 2.2) was produced along with two additional paintings including *Dunia Binatang* (Animal World) (fig 2.15) and *Kampung Nelayan* (Fishing Village) (fig 2.16), there are no longer representational forms in Nashar's paintings. Instead, each of these canvases is an abstract composition comprised of geometric forms and contrasting colors. In contrast to Nashar's earlier works, there is also no longer a correspondence between a work's title and what is presented on the picture plane. Each of these paintings were likely part of Nashar's 1977 solo exhibition held at Taman Ismail Marzuki that included forty paintings. Notably, eleven of these were titled *Alam*. In the formulation of his Three-Nons in 1973 Nashar does not explicitly reference "alam" as a contributing factor. Nevertheless, his attention to alam is apparent in later works if only by the titles he assigned and even more so, across his writing. For time and again, he references the imperative for artists to become one with alam. In the next section I will elaborate on this by paying heed to Nashar's pedagogical orientation that was shaped alongside OE and Zaini.

### Nature Acts as our Teacher: Nashar, OE, and Zaini's Role as Educators

Nashar's association with OE and Zaini is evidenced by his activities as a teacher in Jakarta. After his stint in Bali in 1958, Nashar returned to Jakarta where OE invited him to help lead painting lessons at Balai Budaya. This experience was foundational when later OE, Nashar, and Zaini were tasked with leading the painting studio at the Jakarta Art Institute.

The Jakarta Art Institute opened in 1970. It was originally referred to as LPKJ (Lembaga Pendidikan Kesenian Jakarta). The decision to establish an art academy in Jakarta occurred in correlation with the development of a cultural complex in Jakarta known as Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM) and the establishment of the Jakarta Arts Council (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, DKJ) in the aftermath of 1965. At that time, then Governor Ali Sadikin sought to make Jakarta a center of culture. He acknowledged what was the lack of infrastructure to support the activities of artists. Through the development of TIM along with DKJ, and LPKJ his goal was to create a gathering spot

for artists and cultural producers.<sup>277</sup> All of Jakarta's Minangkabau modernists played an integral part in the development of these institutions either as members of the Jakarta Arts Council or as teachers at LPKJ.<sup>278</sup>

As the leaders of LKPJ's painting studio OE, Nashar, and Zaini envisioned a program that would draw on the characteristics of the *pesantren* (Muslim boarding school) and sanggar systems. This pedagogical interest can be traced to their first painting lessons at Balai Budaya and was born from their desire to develop an academy that was distinct from Yogyakarta and Bandung. At Balai Budaya, OE, Nashar and Zaini's paintings lessons were oriented towards the idea of a "free academy" (akademi bebas) where free referred to a focus on practice and experience rather than academic theory and knowledge. This rejection of theory and knowledge or academic subject matter was rooted in their belief that to "become a painter (artist) you must paint (work), rather than sit in a classroom and read textbooks.<sup>279</sup> Because the experience of artists in Jakarta had not been dictated by an academy up to that point, OE, Nashar, and Zaini sought to hold onto other institutional structures that had defined their experience as students because of what they saw as the merits of these systems. These artists were a product of Indonesia's revolutionary sanggar. Those who received "formal" training did so at art institutions modeled on alternative structures. For instance, Zaini studied at INS Kayutanam, which is comparable to Santiniketan and has features also found in pesantren, like dormitories where students lived. INS Kayutanam and Santiniketan both placed emphasis on the value of a holistic education that focused on the integration of arts, culture, and spirituality. These alternative institutional structures fostered independence and taught aspiring artists to engage with and learn from their natural surroundings. In chapter three I will elaborate on the pedagogical orientation of INS Kayutanam to demonstrate further how it was structured by a respect for the intersection of Islam, alam, and adat. In his Surat-Surat Malam Nashar explains how he along with OE and Zaini approached teaching and learning at LPKJ through workshops in and around Jakarta. This specific excerpt describes a workshop that he and OE led for their students at Kalibaru River located north of Jakarta:

I am certain that we both know and understand that a person cannot be taught (*dididik*) or molded (*dicetak*) to become an artist. If this is the case, what does it mean for this academy to want to educate people to become professional artists? In my opinion, if educate (*mendidik*) is meant in the same sense as teaching (*mengajar*), it will be impossible, even in vain. And if this understanding is carried out, it is certain that the result will be other than what is desired. Keeping this in mind, the term educate must be redefined. Because of this, in our workshop, the term educate possesses the meaning: to invite (*mengajak*). The students are invited to work (with no obligations) according to their own abilities. As their mentors, we work very hard not to intervene. We invite them to work by themselves in order that they will each feel the process of their souls moving. We invite them to work continuously in order that a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>277</sup> Ali Sadikin is credited with playing an integral role in modernizing Jakarta during his tenure as governor. For insights on his motivation to establish Taman Ismail Marzuki as a haven for Jakarta's artists see, Ali Sadikin, "Seniman Harus Mencipta, Bertanggung Jawab dan Mengurus Diri," in *Bang Ali: Demi Jakarta 1966-1977*, ed. Ramadhan K.H. (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1992), 180-190. For more on the history and politics of the Taman Ismail Marzuki complex with a particular focus on the Jakarta Arts Council see, Helly Minarti, "Artists Versus the City: The Curious Story of the Jakarta Arts Council 1968-2017," in *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Politics*, eds. Peter Eckersall and Helena Grehan (London: Routledge, 2019), 181-184.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>278</sup> Notably at the outset, Nashar was not part of DKJ. He only took up a post with this organization after Zaini died in 1974. Letter 7 in *Surat-Surat Malam* addresses critique from OE that all Nashar wanted to do was paint when others were trying to develop culture at the time TIM was established (and subsequently DKJ).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>279</sup> Nashar, Nashar oleh Nashar, 178.

creative energy will grow. We are not their "teachers" rather, nature and life (*alam dan kehidupan*) are their teachers. "To have a teacher" (*berguru*) means the same thing as being one with that "teacher." As painters this is also our philosophy. Our only responsibility is to realize this … Of course, various things about this are difficult to explain. In fact, it is impossible to portray or understand this only using words. At most, such an explanation will function as an introduction before coming face to face with one's "teacher."<sup>280</sup>

This description interrogates the role of the teacher as well as what a teacher can be. It places emphasis on the individuality of students. It asserts that Nashar did not view himself as a teacher precisely because he believed art could not be taught. He and his compatriots were guides. They invited their students to learn from the penultimate teacher, namely their surroundings or nature (alam) and life (kehidupan). They did not intervene in this process. Rather, they acted as mentors to encourage their students to tap into a "creative energy" that they believed could be derived from these sources. This description mirrors Nashar's own adat berkarya. He embraced his surroundings and sought to arrive at a deeper understanding of his experiences through his art. This in turn was portrayed on canvas by arriving at "sesuatu." Namely, "a feeling deep in [his] heart that [could] not be expressed with words. It [could] only be felt, and only by those who [were] sensitive to it."<sup>281</sup> Further, it was achieved by disregarding concept, technique, and form. In this description Nashar does not use the specific phrase "alam takambang jadi guru" (nature acts as our teacher), however, it appears to draw directly on this adage. The insistence that "to have a teacher" is the same as "being one with that teacher" calls to mind the idea that Minangkabau adat is a system grounded in an understanding of and ability to interpret the natural world. By looking at Nashar's pedagogical orientation that was supported by his compatriots it is possible to draw insights concerning his attention to his Minangkabau origins.

Nashar, OE, and Zaini are remembered today for the mark that they left on the Jakarta Art Institute and the impact that workshops like the one described above had on their students. In the early 1970s, however, not everyone was a proponent of their approach to teaching. For those that advocated a more formal model of education, the atmosphere that OE, Nashar, and Zaini's painting studio fostered, in which students and teachers were completely unaware of time and sometimes lived in the studio, was a point of contention.<sup>282</sup> In 1972, the first head of the academy, painter Popo Iskandar (1927–2000), was replaced by sculptor Gregorius Sidharta. This led to significant debate regarding the direction of the academy and, ultimately, the implementation of a stricter curriculum for the fine arts department. Unwilling to conform to the new requirements, OE and Nashar left their posts.<sup>283</sup> The date of this departure is significant. It not only corresponded with Nashar's formulation of his Three-Nons in early 1973 but also, OE's decisions to mudik or return to his village of birth in West Sumatra. As I will show, OE's return to West Sumatra was rooted in his commitment to regional cultures as a key site for the development of Indonesian art. In the next section I will examine OE's position on regional cultures as well as what he accomplished during his time in West Sumatra. This is significant because it led to his assertion that the "Minangkabau-ness" of his compatriots was clear in their work.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>280</sup> Nashar, Surat-Surat Malam (Jakarta: Budaya Jaya, 1976), 31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>281</sup> Nashar, Nashar oleh Nashar, 135.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>282</sup> Tri Aru Wiratno, "Nashar: Pembawa Semangat Kesanggaran," 111.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>283</sup> Dolorosa Sinaga, "Zaini: Seni Untuk Kemuliaan Manusia," in 19 Tokoh Fakultas Seni Rupa Institut Kesenian Jakarta 1970

<sup>- 2010,</sup> eds. Dolorosa Sinaga et al. (Jakarta: FSR IKJ, 2010), 93.

## Mudik (Returning Home): OE and "Minangkabau-ness"

In 1972 OE left Jakarta to return to his village of birth, Kota Gadang. His goal was to immerse himself in the region's history and Minangkabau culture. Located on the outskirts of Bukittinggi in the highlands of West Sumatra, Kota Gadang is part of a region that is steeped in cultural and historical significance. It is located within the confines of what is considered to be the birthplace of Minangkabau. This area and its significance to Minangkabau adat will be discussed in detail in chapter three. Bukittinggi was also the administrative capital of West Sumatra under the Dutch and during the post-independence era. Over time this contributed to the cosmopolitan character of Bukittinggi and its surroundings including Kota Gadang. Kota Gadang became exemplary of Minangkabau progressiveness during the late-colonial era as a result of the number of educated men and women who lived there.<sup>284</sup> OE directly engaged with the character of this region and its significance to Minangkabau in his attempt to revive the spirit of Kota Gadang through the creation of an archive of the village's illustrious history.<sup>285</sup>

As one news article from 1973 notes, OE's desire to mudik began to develop as early as 1963.<sup>286</sup> It took nearly a decade to execute. The specific reasons for this delay are not outlined in this article, but the author speculates about the stigma associated with a migrant's return to the Minangkabau homeland and the reality that West Sumatra lacks arts infrastructure in comparison to a city like Jakarta, where OE had lived since the early 1930s.<sup>287</sup> Other hinderances must have involved the turbulent nature of the first decades of Indonesia's independence while some scholars speculate that this departure was spurred by the backlash he received following his delivery of a speech in 1969 at Taman Ismail Marzuki.<sup>288</sup>

In this speech titled "Seni Lukis di Indonesia Dulu dan Sekarang" (Painting in Indonesia: Then and Now) OE declared that Indonesian painting was still "in the making."<sup>289</sup> This statement can be situated within a much longer debate that began in the late-colonial era concerning the best direction for the development of culture in Indonesia that began with a series of exchanges that are referred to as the Cultural Polemic (*Polemik Kebudayaan*). At the heart of these exchanges was a conflict between those that believed it was necessary to break from foreign influence to prioritize local traditions and those that believed that a synthesis between east and west would be the best route to achieve new styles of representation reflective of Indonesia. For OE, the tendency of certain artists in the post-independence period to imitate their foreign counterparts was a key deterrent in the development of art that was distinctly Indonesian.<sup>290</sup> Another deterrent was the effect that politics had had in the preceding years because of Lekra's dominance.<sup>291</sup> In his speech, OE offered a formula through which Indonesian painting might find itself. Namely, by paying heed to what he calls the "childish spirit" (*jiwa kekanak-kanakan*) and a given region's "environment" (*bumi dan alamnya*).<sup>292</sup> OE

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>284</sup> For example, Rohana Kudus (1884 – 1972), who is recognized as the first female journalist in Indonesia was born and lived in Kota Gadang where she founded a school called *Kerajinan Amai Setia* (Mothers' Solidarity Handicrafts). This school was intended to teach girls craft and skills beyond normal household duties as well as to read (Hadler 2008, 128-129).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>285</sup> Muchlis Sulin, "Oesman Effendi: Pelukis yang Pulang Kampung untuk Berdakwah – Kebudayaan Minang Menuju Kepunahannya?," *Indonesia Raya Minggu*, October 28, 1973.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>288</sup> Aminudin TH Siregar, Leiden, the Netherlands, July 2019.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>289</sup> Oesman Effendi, "Seni Lukis di Indonesia Dulu dan Sekarang," in *Seni Lukis Indonesia Tidak Ada* (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2007), 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>290</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>291</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>292</sup> Ibid., 17-18.; The term "bumi" is translated as both earth and Earth.

believed that children were geniuses because "they draw without thinking."<sup>293</sup> This resulted in art that was marked by a purity that is lost once an artist is introduced to new ideas that in turn become a barometer for their success. With a desire to find a "perfect aesthetic or a perfect technique" that might "result in a work, automatically classified as a masterpiece" the painter's voice had "disappeared."<sup>294</sup> As a result Indonesian painting had no "brand," "personality," or "identity."<sup>295</sup> For OE, it did not matter if a work of art was "particularly brilliant" or "appeared to be left behind by modern concepts."<sup>296</sup> Instead, what mattered is that an artist not only find oneself and stay true to that self, but also create according to the "pure calling of their soul."<sup>297</sup> To do this the environment was key. For OE, this was evidenced by examples including regional variations of Buddhist art across Asia as well as Le Corbusier's development of a city in Chandigarah, India.<sup>298</sup> Both demonstrate an attention to the character or culture and environment of a specific locale. OE was invested in thinking about what regional or local cultures might offer in the development of a "unique type of art" with "its own brand."<sup>299</sup> No longer tied to LPKJ in 1972 when OE returned to West Sumatra he was acting on his own position asserted in this speech.

During his time in West Sumatra OE immersed himself in the daily life of Kota Gadang. He received the many visitors who sought him out for advice and assisted in the revival of local craft industries. He helped to improve the local environs of Kota Gadang by making an inventory of agricultural lands, mapping the property lines of residents, and charting the lineages of each clan (*suku*). He began to compile an archive that included documentation of the spiritual and cultural life of the area. He also painted, creating more works than he had in Jakarta. OE described this experience as "incredible" because it allowed him to feel "just how strong his spiritual bond was to his village of birth."<sup>300</sup> This statement suggests that by returning to West Sumatra where he immersed himself in the rhythms of the Minangkabau homeland, he was able to achieve something that was not possible in Jakarta. His achievements are evidenced by a shift in his stylistic orientation that corresponds with his time in West Sumatra.

A shift in OE's stylistic orientation is demonstrated by a comparison of two works including a watercolor from 1967 that was part of a series titled *Kampung* (Village) (**fig 2.17**) and a painting done with acrylic on canvas titled *Matahari* (Sun) (**fig 2.18**) that was part of a solo exhibition held in April 1977 at TIM. Neither of these works includes representational forms. However, whereas *Kampung* is characterized by a more intentional organization of geometric forms like the triangles neatly aligned at the bottom edge of the painting that results in a balanced composition, *Matahari* is comprised of what appears to be a single abstracted form. Further, in contrast to *Kampung*, in *Matahari* there is a seeming disregard for technical properties like line or space. In one review the following was written of works like *Matahari* that were part of OE's 1977 exhibition:

[They] are more advanced than OE's previous works ... This can be seen in the way that the lines are laid out, the colors are very exciting along with ... [OE's] spiritual expression. There are no objects or forms. Instead, the paintings are truly abstract ... They are not dependent

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid. <sup>298</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>293</sup> Oesman Effendi, "Seni Lukis di Indonesia Dulu dan Sekarang," 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>300</sup> Ibid.

on real objects as is the case in naturalist, expressionist or impressionist paintings. Instead, they are marked by a continuous pouring of brushstrokes.<sup>301</sup>

This statement describes a process that has significant parallels with Nashar's Three-Nons. By relinquishing oneself from the constraints of concept, technique, and aesthetic or the academic conventions of painting, the result is more immediate, even visceral. It is as this reviewer states, "a spiritual expression." By returning to West Sumatra where he was able to experience the daily rhythms of Minangkabau life and directly observe the environs that constitute the center of Alam Minangkabau OE tapped into something within himself. Like Nashar's experience in Bali, this led OE to his production of paintings that observers noted were different and more impressive than his previous works. OE's decision to mudik proved beneficial to his process and work, however, it was not without its frustrations and disappointments.

In July 1976, a few years after his long-anticipated return to his homeland, OE was back in Jakarta to deliver a speech about the state of painting in West Sumatra at an exhibition opening at TIM. The exhibition was the first time that a group of ten artists who were all based in West Sumatra were grouped together under the banner of their regional origins.<sup>302</sup> The short introduction in this exhibition catalogue written by Ajip Rosidi, the head of the Jakarta Arts Council at this time, drew attention to this detail indicating that it was both notable and uncommon. Whereas exhibitions highlighting the work of artists active in various cities on the island of Java had previously been organized at TIM, this was the first time that attention was given to a specific region further afield on an island like Sumatra.<sup>303</sup> Because of this Ajip lauded this exhibition as a positive attempt to highlight the potential of artists across the archipelago in previously unrecognized regions that might contribute to the growth of Indonesia's art world and thus, awaited cultivation by the community and government.

Titled "*Gerakan Seni Lukis di Sumatera Barat*" (A Painting Movement in West Sumatra), OE's speech addressed the history and status of the visual arts in West Sumatra. He touched on such positive aspects as the prestige and subsequent influence of the Mooi Indie landscape painter Wakidi on generations of artists as well as the more recent impact of art institutions in West Sumatra on the growth of this region's infrastructure. However, OE's speech was dominated by extreme pessimism. This pessimism was rooted in what he judged to be the increasingly detrimental impact since independence of "foreign," "western," or "modern culture" on Minangkabau society, generally, and the visual arts in West Sumatra, specifically.<sup>304</sup> OE was disappointed to learn that "those Minang you meet in West Sumatra know very little about local custom and are not religious."<sup>305</sup> The effects of westernization were exacerbated by merantau that drained West Sumatra of its promising talent and left little hope for the development of the Minangkabau homeland because it was uncommon for those who made a name for themselves outside of West Sumatra to return home.

While the majority of OE's commentary focused on West Sumatra, OE briefly spoke about Nashar, Rusli, and Zaini, remarking specifically on his compatriots' "Minangkabau-ness":

<sup>304</sup> Oesman Effendi, "Gerakan Seni Lukis di Sumatra Barat."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>301</sup> Slamet Kirnanto, "Rusli tentang Lukisan Oesman Effendi," Berita Buana, April 18, 1977.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>302</sup> Oesman Effendi, "Gerakan Seni Lukis di Sumatra Barat," *Budaya Jaya*, no. 100, TH. IX (September 1976).; Oesman Effendi, "A Painting Movement in West Sumatra" (Abridged)," in *The Modern in Southeast Asian Art: A Reader Volume I*, eds. T.K. Sabapathy and Patrick Flores, trans. Katherine Bruhn (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore and NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, 2023), 478-486.; The artists part of this exhibition included A. Alin de, Ady Rosa, A. Gani Lubis, Alwi Karmena, Amir Sjarif, Arby Samah, Nazar Ismail, Tamsir Tay, Upita Agustine, and Wisran Hadi. <sup>303</sup> These cities included Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Jakarta.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>305</sup> Ibid.

Explanations regarding the background of Minangkabau culture have long ceased because it has been proven that those Minangnese who advance and become successful or mature outside of West Sumatra generally cannot separate themselves from the influence of Minang culture, even if they swear on their lives that they no longer associate themselves with Minang. In fact, it is precisely at one's career peak that their Minang-ness appears most complete. For example, Zaini and Nashar who have both achieved prominence beyond West Sumatra. Even if it appears that they have separated themselves from and no longer care about Minang culture, the Minang-ness of these painters is very strong. Perhaps they do not realize this . . . Likewise, the painter Rusli, although a *peranakan* (mixed Chinese/Malay) Minang, in his painting he is Minang through and through, even if he alone will not admit this. Think of this as a puzzle for these three painters.<sup>306</sup>

This statement is noteworthy for several reasons. It not only draws attention to the reality of Minangkabau migrants and what is an ongoing relationship to "home" no matter how far they travel or how long they have been away from Minangkabau but also, it underscores what OE himself believed was the centrality of Minangkabau to the work of his Minangkabau patriots. OE did not provide an explicit elaboration on what he meant by the "Minang-ness" of these artists, either in the speech in question or elsewhere. He did, however, offer hints. For instance, in this speech he underscored the fact "In Minangkabau, the basic philosophy of life is to learn from nature, while the laws of society are based on adat and Islam." <sup>307</sup> By stating that such "Minang-ness" was most apparent at the peak of an artist's career he also suggested that a connection to Minangkabau was neither inevitable nor immediate. Rather, it necessitated cultivation and by 1976 when he delivered this speech, it had become apparent to him in the work of his compatriots. By 1976 Nashar had achieved his Three-Nons and while he does not mention himself in this speech, as demonstrated by the example of the stylistic shift that occurred in OE's work in West Sumatra, OE too had arrived at a new style of expression. Through this process of cultivation both Nashar and OE moved away from representational forms as a result of their efforts to embrace the world around them. The fact that neither of these artists included representational forms in their work after reaching a so-called "peak" in their career's points to the centrality of the intangible facets of alam to their work. They were no longer attempting to portray alam's physical reality but rather, were "digging into [their] subconscious mind[s]" to reveal what Aminudin TH Siregar refers to as 'essential forms.""308

## Regional Cultures and Pembangunan (Development): Art in Suharto's New Order

Nashar's interest in Bali and OE's return to West Sumatra, in other words, an attention to regional culture, was not distinct to these artists. As art historian and curator Chabib Duta Hapsoro points out, in the 1960s and 70s there was a pattern in Indonesia whereby artists searched for new artistic resources in rural regions.<sup>309</sup> For some artists, like OE, this meant going back to their region of birth. For other artists, like Nashar, it meant exploring unfamiliar cultures and places specifically, Bali. A. D. Pirous (b. 1932), who is from Aceh in North Sumatra, and Batara Lubis (1927–86), who

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>306</sup> Oesman Effendi, "A Painting Movement in West Sumatra" (Abridged)," in *The Modern in Sontheast Asian Art: A Reader Volume I,* 480.; This part of OE's speech is well known today among contemporary artists from Minangkabau who are interested in the legacy of these four artists as well as their position as a distinct "aesthetic school" (*mazhab estetika*) separate from Bandung and Yogyakarta.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>307</sup> Ibid., 479.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>308</sup> Aminudin TH Siregar, "Mazhab Estetika Seniman Minang di Indonesia," 29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>309</sup> Chabib Duta Hapsoro, WhatsApp message to author, September 13, 2022.

was born in North Sumatra and was part of the Mandailing ethnic group, returned to their hometowns in the 1970s. The number of artists who traveled to Bali is much longer than the list of artists who returned to their regions of birth and includes Affandi, Hendra Gunawan, Fadjar Sidik (1930–2004), Rusli, and Srihadi Soedarsono (1931–2022). Sunaryo (b. 1943) travelled to even more distant locales, including Papua and Nias. This turn to regional cultures and rural ideals and their associated environments can be traced to the political and economic effects of 1965 and the impact of the development policies put into place by the New Order regime beginning in the early 1970s.

As referenced earlier in this chapter under Suharto's New Order, despite the elimination of Indonesia's communist party and Lekra, artists were not freed to produce whatever they wanted. There was a very real fear of retribution for expressing views that did not align with state policies. Further, after the initial stabilization of New Order politics following the intensive killing and imprisonment of those accused of Leftist sympathies, new restrictions were placed on society that limited the ability of artists, creative producers, and intellectuals to express themselves freely. This can be understood in the context of Suharto's development policies and reaction to them.

When Suharto came to power Indonesia was in a state of economic disarray. The country was left with a negative growth rate, 600 percent inflation, and a national debt of over two billion USD.<sup>310</sup> In this context, economic stability and growth took precedence over political development. Pembangunan (development) emerged as a key word that defined the New Order.<sup>311</sup> In 1969 the first of a series of five-year development plans (rencana pembangunan lima tahun, referred to as Repelita) were implemented that laid the groundwork for rapid industrialization and foreign investment. Accompanied by a rise in oil prices in the 1970s, the country experienced significant growth. This, in turn, resulted in investment in infrastructure, a reduction in poverty, and a rise in per capita income.<sup>312</sup> In short, as architectural historian Abidin Kusno writes, "The notion of 'development,' broadly similar to modernization theory, inform[ed] the political culture of the Suharto regime and replace[d] the populist politics of Sukarno's 'revolution."<sup>313</sup> While there were significant material improvements, like better quality of life and economic stability, there were also negatives aspects of development. Laborers across the country were exploited and natural environments were destroyed because of the extraction of resources and growth that reflected the perceived benefit of modernization. This led to significant disillusionment with Suharto's New Order and calls to end foreign investment that culminated with demonstrations in early 1974. Referred to as the "Malari Incident," these demonstrations were led by students, resulted in eleven deaths, and ended with a ban placed on all student organizations.

In Jakarta specifically, following Indonesia's independence, there was an "unstoppable flow of migrants" to the nation's capital in the 1950s.<sup>314</sup> According to the 1961 census, Jakarta's population reached 2.9 million. This was an increase of nearly 1.8 million inhabitants since 1948.<sup>315</sup> As a result, Jakarta faced significant infrastructural challenges in areas ranging from housing to transportation; but, as the showpiece of the nation, the capital city also experienced significant changes as a consequence of modernization projects initiated by both Sukarno and Suharto. These changes are exemplified by the area in the center of Jakarta, pictured in a photograph taken in 1971 that depicts the Hotel Indonesia roundabout (Bundaran HI) (**fig 2.19**). Developed in the 1960s and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>310</sup> Michael R.J. Vatikiotis, *Indonesian Politics under Subarto: The Rise and Fall of the New Order* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>311</sup> Ariel Heryanto, "The Development of Development," Indonesia 46 (1988), 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>312</sup> Michael R.J. Vatikiotis, Indonesian Politics under Subarto: The Rise and Fall of the New Order, 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>313</sup> Abidin Kusno, Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space and Political Cultures in Indonesia (New York: Routledge, 2000), 106.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>314</sup> Christopher Silver, *Planning the Megacity: Jakarta in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 92.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>315</sup> Ibid., 92.

early 70s, this roundabout structured the urban environment of Jakarta's Minangkabau modernists discussed in this chapter. In 1961 construction began on a six-lane boulevard that connected this roundabout to the square where the National Monument (Monumen Nasional), would be completed in 1971. One year later, in 1962, Indonesia's first international class hotel, Hotel Indonesia, opened on Bundaran HI. One of the only five-star hotels in Southeast Asia, Hotel Indonesia quickly became a meeting point for foreign dignitaries and movie stars. In this photograph, the National Monument can be seen peeking out at the center, to the left of Jakarta's first office tower, Wisma Nusantara, which was built in 1964. This cosmopolitan center is located just over half a mile from Balai Budaya and two miles from the Taman Ismail Marzuki complex where the Jakarta Art Institute (LPKJ) is located. In this context Jakarta's natural environment was replaced by a rapidly changing urban jungle.

Nashar traveled to Bali on numerous occasions. However, he always returned to Jakarta. OE's trip to West Sumatra while integral to his practice was short-lived. He also returned to Jakarta where he lamented what in West Sumatra he saw as the effects of westernization because no one in Minangkabau understood Minangkabau adat. As demonstrated by both Nashar and OE, their experience as migrants was integral to the development of their unique approach to art making that increasingly moved away from representational forms and has earned them the distinction, along with Rusli and Zaini, as an aesthetic school distinct from Bandung and Yogyakarta. As referenced in chapter one, under Suharto's New Order there was an emphasis on regional cultures. This is exemplified by the development of "Taman Mini" or the Beautiful Indonesia in Miniature Park (Taman Mini Indonesia Indah) where each of Indonesia's provinces and its associated ethnic group was represented through its traditional architecture and forms like regional dress and performance. Jakarta's Minangkabau modernists neither drew on these more familiar forms of regional culture nor did they engage with other forms of cultural expression associated with Minangkabau like figurative speech. Instead, their engagement with Minangkabau was more subtle through their embrace of the notion that "nature acts as our teacher" that in turn, led to portrayals of alam albeit, under alternate frames of reference like Nashar's Three-Nons.

# Introduction

In early 2021, Minangkabau-born artist Erizal AS (b. 1979) began his most recent body of work, a series of large-scale landscape paintings, which he titled Darek #1: Bentang Alam (Heartland #1: Landscapes). These works were exhibited in September 2022 at a solo exhibition sponsored by Gajah Gallery, the Singapore-based commercial gallery that represents Erizal (fig 3.1). Characteristic of Erizal's signature style, these paintings are abstract and semi-abstract compositions made by applying and manipulating thick layers of oil paint. One of the paintings in the series, Hamparan Sawah, Bukit Barisan, Danau & Pelangi Sore Itu (Field, Barisan Mountains, Lake & Rainbow that Afternoon) (fig 3.2), is exemplary of Erizal's semi-abstract compositions in which the forms that appear on the picture plane appear to correspond to the work's title. The foreground of this painting is dominated by shades of green and streaks of yellow and orange that can be read as the fields referenced in the painting's title. The painting's horizon line is constituted by a depiction of the Barisan mountains, a mountain range in the highlands of West Sumatra not far from the home of Erizal's parents. To the left of these mountains is a depiction of Singgalang lake from which a rainbow emerges and disappears into the clouds. What is more striking than the painting's subject matter, however, is Erizal's technique. This is because of how it departs from more conventional approaches to landscape painting that have dominated understandings of this genre in Indonesian art history since the late-colonial era.

As was the case in many colonial contexts, in Indonesia landscape painting was a dominant genre throughout the colonial era. It played a role in the construction of a certain image of the colonial empire that not only erased the evils of colonialism but also contributed to the exotic allure of the colony whose environment was quite unlike that in Europe.<sup>316</sup> In the early twentieth century, landscape painting became a point of resistance for nationalist artists who sought to inspire new modes of expression that depicted the realities of the Indonesian people.<sup>317</sup> This contributed to the stigmatization of artists native to Indonesia who were associated with this genre of landscape painting following Indonesia's declared independence from the Dutch in 1945. However, while landscape painting became stigmatized amongst nationalist artists and in the historiography of Indonesian modern art because of the genre's association with colonialism, in West Sumatra landscape painting is considered to be a kind of "traditional heritage."<sup>318</sup> This is due in part to the life and work of the region's first modern artist, Wakidi (1889-1979). Erizal's choice to mudik or return to West Sumatra can be attributed to the legacy of Wakidi and the landscape tradition in West Sumatra. He was moreover motivated by the specific landscapes that both he and Wakidi depicted. This is because of the relationship of these landscapes to an area in West Sumatra that is considered the birthplace of Minangkabau.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>316</sup> For more on the colonial influence of landscape painting see Romita Ray, Under the Banyan Tree: Relocating the Picturesque in British India (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).; Krista A. Thompson, An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).; and Jill H. Casid, Soning Empire:

Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).; and Jill H. Casid, Soming Empire. Landscape and Colonization (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>317</sup> The most well-known statement against landscape painting during the colonial era can be found in Sindudarsono Sudjojono, *Seni Loekis, Kesenian, dan Seniman* (Jogjakarta: Indonesia Sekarang, 1946).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>318</sup> Aminudin TH Siregar, "Painting Darek," in Darek #1: Bentang Alam (Singapore: Gajah Gallery, 2022), 31.

According to legend as narrated by *Tambo*, a form of oral history specific to Minangkabau passed down from generation to generation, the first settlement in Minangkabau was known as Pariangan. As Minangkabau born historian Taufik Abdullah writes, this settlement was established after Maharadja Diradja, one of Iskandar the Great's three sons, landed atop Mount Marapi – a volcano located in the Barisan mountain range – at a time when the earth was still covered by water. As this water receded and the descendants of Maharadja Diradja expanded, the heartland of Minangkabau was established beginning with Pariangan and eventually encompassing three regions known as *Luhak nan Tigo* (three wells) (**Map 3.1**).<sup>319</sup> Until now, this heartland that is referred to variously as Luhak nan Tigo, *darek* Minangkabau, and *ranah* Minangkabau is special, even scared because it was here that Minangkabau adat was first conceptualized. It is still thought to be the place where Minangkabau adat is strongest. Wakidi and Erizal's landscape paintings all depict sites in this heartland. Because of this these paintings are not understood to perpetuate a colonial way of seeing but rather, are read as depictions of Alam Minangkabau (the Minangkabau World) by audiences associated with Minangkabau.

This chapter first lays out the historical legacy of landscape painting in Indonesia to situate Wakidi's significance for a historiography of fine art associated with Minangkabau and the region of West Sumatra. Along with an overview of Wakidi's biography, I reflect on his inclusion in anthropologist and art historian Claire Holt's monograph of 1967, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*, which includes the first account written in English of modern art in Indonesia. This historiographic discussion sets the stage for my consideration of how Erizal and other Minangkabau born contemporary artists have taken up Wakidi's legacy alongside the actual physical landscapes that constitute the Minangkabau heartland as a focus of their artistic endeavors. These artists articulate a narrative of art making that is both divergent from and parallel to the national narrative of Indonesian modern art that follows the periodization of Indonesian history and is centered on the island of Java. It has also contributed to the use of localized terminology like *"lukisan alam"* amongst artists associated with Minangkabau to refer to the landscape painting genre more generally. This underscores the part that adat has played in the construction of an understanding of and relationship to the natural world in Minangkabau.

## Landscape Painting and the Historiography of Indonesian Modern Art

The existing discourse on the early history of Indonesian modern art associates landscape painting with colonialism and emphasizes a specific artist's voice, that of revolutionary painter Sindudarsono Sudjojono (1913–85).<sup>320</sup> Regarded as one of a handful of founding fathers of modern art in Indonesia, Sudjojono was at the forefront of thinking about the role of art and artists in the lead up to and during Indonesia's revolutionary struggle (1945–49).<sup>321</sup> On the one hand, Sudjojono's influence is evidenced by the part that he played in helping to establish Persagi (Persatuan Ahli-Ahli Gambar Indonesia, Union of Indonesian Drawing Experts), Indonesia's first *sanggar*, or artist association, in 1938. On the other hand, it is evidenced by a collection of thirteen essays that he published in 1946, titled *Seni Loekis, Kesenian, dan Seniman* (Painting, Art, and the Artist), which laid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>319</sup> Taufik Abdullah, "Modernization in the Minangkabau World: West Sumatra in the Early Decades of the Twentieth Century," in *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, ed. by Claire Holt (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 183-185.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>320</sup> Two notable examples include Claire Holt, *Art and Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967) and Agus Burhan, *Perkembangan Seni Lukis Mooi Indie Sampai Persagi di Batavia 1900-1942* (Jakarta: Galeri Nasional Indonesia, 2014).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>321</sup> Other names that are frequently cited alongside Sudjojono as founding fathers of a modern art tradition in Indonesia include Affandi (1907–90) and Hendra Gunawan (1918–83).

out his understanding of what makes a great artist and his prescription for how artists in Indonesia could break free from the reigns of colonial oppression.<sup>322</sup> One of these essays popularized the term *Mooi Indie* (beautiful Indies), which has become synonymous with the style of landscape painting that he and other nationalist artists rejected.

It is commonly thought that the term "Mooi Indie" was first used in 1913 as the title of a collected album of twelve watercolors painted by Dutch artist Fredericus van Rossum du Chattel (1856–1917): *Mooi Indië – Afbeeldingen in Kleuren van Twaalf Aquarellen* (Beautiful Indies: Illustrations of Twelve Watercolors).<sup>323</sup> Two examples taken from this album (**figs. 3.3 and 3.4**) are exemplary of du Chattel's style and the types of scenes that he and other landscape painters in the Dutch East Indies depicted. The first (**fig 3.3**) is a portrayal of the Dutch East Indies countryside bathed in late-afternoon light as indicated by the sky's orange and purple hues and the shadows that cover the paddy fields that glisten in the watercolor's foreground. In contrast, the second watercolor (**fig 3.4**) depicts a riverbed surrounded by a dense tropical forest. Through du Chattel's color palette and soft brushstrokes, the viewer encounters a scene that exudes a soft romanticism accentuated by the inclusion of bodies caught amid their daily activities. Two figures tend to the paddy field; one bends over while the other stands to the side. Another two figures, in the middle of the riverbed, appear to be washing clothes. The expressions on the faces of these figures become another part of the idyllic landscapes that are characteristic of Mooi Indie paintings.

As historian Susie Protschky points out in her study of environment and visual culture in the Dutch East Indies, most foreign painters, like du Chattel, were hobbyists committed to the tranquil version of the Indies that they portrayed for the nostalgic value that such romantic depictions of the landscape held.<sup>324</sup> Importantly, many of these artists were also stakeholders in the stability of Dutch colonial rule. They worked professionally in such occupations as planting, administration, trade, and the military.<sup>325</sup> Du Chattel's son had a plantation in the Indies where du Chattel stayed from 1908 to 1914 and again in 1916.<sup>326</sup> When du Chattel's album was first published, it was reproduced in large quantities and sold to Dutch residents living in the Indies. The reproductions of du Chattel's watercolors became artwork for the walls of colonists' homes and souvenirs upon their return to the metropole.<sup>327</sup>

Until the first decades of the twentieth century, the number of artists in the Dutch East Indies was limited. An uptick occurred in the last decades of colonial rule because permits were granted more freely to enter the colony. Better transportation and communication facilities also supported the growth of tourism and, subsequently, a larger European population from which a meagre art world emerged.<sup>328</sup> In 1902 a Fine Arts Circle was established in present-day Jakarta, then known as Batavia, the colony's capital. The establishment of "sister" Circles in other sites across the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>322</sup> Sindudarsono Sudjojono, Seni Loekis, Kesenian, dan Seniman (Jogjakarta: Indonesia Sekarang, 1946).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>323</sup> Fredericus van Rossum du Chattel, *Mooi Indië – Afbeeldingen in Kleuren van Twaalf Aquarellen* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1913).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>324</sup> Susie Protschky, *Images of the Tropics: Environment and Visual Culture in Colonial Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2011), 15.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 79-81.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>326</sup> Koos van Brakel, "Beautiful Indies Paintings: A Colonial Medium?," in *Beyond the Dutch: Indonesia, the Netherlands and the Visual Arts, from 1900 until Now,* eds. Meta Knol, Remco Raben, and Kitty Zijlmans (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2009), 54.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.; Susie Protschky, Images of the Tropics: Environment and Visual Culture in Colonial Indonesia, 83.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>328</sup> Susie Protschky, "Seductive Landscapes: Gender, Race, and European Representations of Nature in the Dutch East Indies during the Late-Colonial Period," *Gender & History* 20, no. 2 (2008): 382.

colony followed.<sup>329</sup> In 1916 these Circles were consolidated into a confederation, and the Batavia Art Circle was consequently renamed the Bataviasche Kuntskring. A primary activity of these Circles, and especially the Kunstkring, was the organization of exhibitions that introduced Indies society to art being created within the colony and from Europe. The most notable of such exhibitions that included the work of European modernists were those sponsored by Dutch businessman Pierre Alexandre Regnault, who owned paint factories in the Indies. On five different occasions, Regnault made his own private collection, which included works by van Gogh and Picasso, accessible to the public.<sup>330</sup> However, despite the presence of European modern art in the Indies, painters who spent time there, both those who were foreign born and those with mixed-parentage born in the Indies, preferred their "old love"—landscape painting.<sup>331</sup> There was no avant-garde in the last decades of Dutch colonial rule. Instead, the works that were produced were largely representative of the Mooi Indie style because of the commercial value that they held.

This context motivated and shaped the essays that are part of Sudjojono's, *Painting, Art, and the Artist* published in 1946. This collection includes thirteen essays. Until now, the first essay titled, *"Seni Loekis di Indonesia, Sekarang Dan Jang Akan Datang"* (Painting in Indonesia, Now and to Come), reverberates in writing on Indonesian art. This is because this essay not only includes the most-oft cited passage on Indonesian modern art history but also is responsible for the popularization of the term Mooi Indie:

The paintings we see nowadays are mostly landscapes: rice fields being plowed, rice fields inundated by clear and calm water, or a hut in the middle of a ripening rice field with the inevitable coconut palms or bamboo stools nearby, or bamboo groves with blue-shimmering mountains in the background...everything is very beautiful and romantic, paradiscal, everything is very pleasing, calm, and peaceful. Such paintings carry only one meaning: the beautiful Indies (*Mooi Indie*)...the mountain, the coconut palm, and the rice field are the holy trinity in the scenes of these painters...and should a painter dare to paint something different than this trinity...the art dealer will tell him, "This is not for us, sir" ...what he really means is, "This is not for the tourists or the pensioned Hollander, sir."<sup>332</sup>

This passage underscores Sudjojono's disillusionment with the content of Mooi Indie paintings that perpetuated a colonial gaze and structured the Dutch East Indies' art market as indicated by reference to the art dealer in its last two lines. Rather than paintings that depicted the Mooi Indie style's "holy trinity"—rice fields, coconut palms, and mountains set against idyllic backdrops— Sudjojono advocated for work that depicted the reality of the Indonesian people. His own efforts in this regard are exemplified by his painting *Di Depan Kelambu Terbuka* (In Front of the Open Mosquito Net) (**fig I.16**) from 1939. This painting's subject is a prostitute. Staring straight at the viewer her impression is tired and sad. Sudjojono does not try to romanticize her. Instead, he shows her raw emotions. Prostitution was illegal under the Dutch colonial regime, but occurred, in practice. It was a taboo subject that had no place in the Dutch East Indies art world. Despite this, Sudjojono

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>329</sup> According to Koos van Brakel (1999) these organizations were called "sister" Circles because they were not branches of the Batavia Circle and were in cities including Bandung, Surabaya, Buitenzorg (present-day Bogor), and Semarang. Outside of Java Circles were established in Medan and Tanjungkarang in Sumatra and Makassar in Sulawesi (104).
 <sup>330</sup> Koos Van Brakel, "For Evidently, the Fine Arts do not Thrive in the Indies," in *Pictures from the Tropics: Paintings by Western Artists during the Dutch Colonial Period in Indonesia* (Amsterdam: Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, 1999), 105.
 <sup>331</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>332</sup> Sindudarsono Sudjojono, "Seni Loekis di Indonesia, sekarang dan jang akan datang," in *Seni Loekis, Kesenian dan Seniman* (Jogjakarta: Indonesia Sekarang, 1946), 5. Translation Claire Holt 1967, 195.

did not shy away from such subject matter that underscored the poverty and desperation of the native population during the late-colonial era.

According to Sudjojono, the development of Indonesian modern art was dependent on artists who did not look to the market but rather possessed *"jiwa besar"* (big souls). In the essay titled, *"Kesenian, Seniman, dan Masjarakat"* (Art, the Artist and Society) from his 1946 volume, Sudjojono explains that individuals who possess big souls are those that are willing to fight for the well-being of others and remain true to themselves.<sup>333</sup> For Sudjojono, if an artist had a big soul, it did not matter what they painted. This was because, as he states, "the work of art is the artist's *"jiwa ketok"* (visible soul).<sup>334</sup> This perspective is important because it raises questions concerning how and why certain painters who created landscape paintings in the Mooi Indie style maintained a position of prominence in the imagination of audiences both after Indonesia's recognized independence in 1949 and even more so, today. The example of Ernest Dezentjé discussed next speaks to the former, or the position of Mooi Indie landscape paintings in the immediate post-independence period.

The production of Mooi Indie style landscape paintings did not cease with the establishment of an independent Republic nor did the influence of certain artists who had connections to the colonial regime. Ernest Dezentjé is one example. Dezentjé's father was a Dutch citizen of French ancestry who owned a sugar factory in the Dutch East Indies. His mother was Indonesian. Dezentjé was a self-taught artist and was a member of the Bataviasche Kuntskring. After Indonesia's recognized independence, Dezentjé chose to maintain Indonesian rather than Dutch citizenship. This signaled his commitment to the land and its people rather than the colonial regime. It also resulted in his appointment as palace painter under Indonesia's first president Sukarno who collected works by Dezentjé like *Terang Bulan ditengah Sawah* (Fields in the Moonlight) (**fig 3.5**). This painting is a depiction of a rice field. A cluster of trees in the foreground and several palm trees on the horizon line are the most discernible details besides the full moon set at the painting's center and bathes the fields with light.

Sukarno was an avid collector and amassed a sizeable collection of artworks by Indonesian and foreign artists during the revolutionary era and throughout his presidency (1950–67). This collection, documented in large format folios, were sold, and gifted to foreign leaders and diplomats. Landscape paintings like Dezentjé's figure heavily in each folio. In most instances, they are found at the start of a folio followed by the work of artists ranging from Basuski Abdullah (1915–93) who is best known for his production of female portraits portrayed in an alluring manner to revolutionary painters including Sudjojono, Affandi (1907–90), and Hendra Gunawan (1918–83), amongst others. In short, the type of art and the artists that played a part in the myth making of the new nation through their inclusion in Sukarno's collection was not only vast but also included landscape painting in the Mooi Indie style. The stigmatization of Mooi Indie paintings can thus, be better understood by looking closer at the dominance of Sudjojono's voice in the historiography of Indonesian modern art.

Indonesia's historiography follows a standard periodization that is rooted in moments of colonial and state political change and control.<sup>335</sup> The historiography of art is no different. It follows

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>333</sup> Sindudarsono Sudjojono, "Kesenian, Seniman, dan Masjarakat," in *Seni Lukis, Kesenian, dan Seniman* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Aksara Indonesia, 2000), 93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>334</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>335</sup> The periodization of Indonesian historiography can either be divided into three broad periods (precolonial, colonial, independence) or subdivided as follows: Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms, the arrival of Islam, European company rule, British interregnum, cultivation system, liberal policy, ethical policy, rise of nationalism, Japanese occupation, Revolution, parliamentary democracy, guided democracy New Order, and the post-Suharto or *reformasi* era. This has been criticized because it ignores deeper structures and continuities in history and gives prominence to the European role in Indonesian history. On these aspects of history see J.C. Van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society: Essays in Social and Economic History* (The

a trajectory that reads something like this: Raden Saleh (1816–80) was the first Western-trained painter of significance. After Raden Saleh, there was a void. This void was filled by landscape painters-including Wakidi-who followed the lead of Dutch and other European naturalists and were considered proponents of the Mooi Indie style. From here, Sudjojono and the artists part of the revolutionary generation that agitated for change and subsequently contributed to debates about the best direction for Indonesian culture in the post-independence generation emerged. The production and dissemination of art history in Indonesia and Southeast Asia has until recently been limited due in large part to the almost complete absence of art history departments in universities across the region. Instead of the academy, exhibitions have served as important sites for the production and interrogation of history. This reality presents limitations for interrogating existing historiographies or timelines like that cited here and advancing new paradigms.<sup>336</sup> This is due to factors like the length of exhibition catalogue essays, the time spent preparing for such exhibitions, and what is often the commercial orientation of exhibitions. As a result, this timeline along with names like Abdullah Suriosubroto (1879–1941), Mas Pirngadie (1875–1936), and Wakidi are repeated time and again. These three artists are recognized as the most noteworthy Mooi Indie painters native to Indonesia. I attribute this reputation and even more so, their ongoing prominence in discourse on Indonesian modern art history to their inclusion in Claire Holt's, Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change, published in 1967.

Claire Holt traveled to Indonesia to document the architectural monuments and the work of dancers, painters, and other artists across the archipelago in the late-1950s. Her research was supported by Cornell University where she was part of the Modern Indonesia Project. This project was started in 1954 with support from the Ford Foundation and Cornell University. Its purpose was to train Indonesian scholars and create field experts from the United States.<sup>337</sup> The final chapter of Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change, which resulted from Holt's trip is the first account written in English on modern art in Indonesia. In Holt's monograph, Sudjojono's essay, quoted above, sets the stage for her description and analysis of the activities of artists including Sudjojono who she frames as the bearers of a new tradition of art making that sought to represent the independent republic. A primary question that marked debates of the revolutionary era and the first decade of independence, or the period that frames Holt's analysis, emerged from the Cultural Polemic (Polemik Kebudayaan) or "Great Debate" of the 1930s: should Indonesian culture prioritize a synthesis of East and West, or should it look to its past and instead rely on traditional belief systems and the customs of the some three-hundred groups that comprised the archipelago?<sup>338</sup> Until at least the 1990s, this debate colored the work of post-colonial writers who consistently defined the development of modern art in Indonesia in the binary terms of colonial rejection and Indonesian nationalist aspirations. In this context, Holt's work laid the foundation for a narrative set in stone that was especially impactful, and in some cases detrimental, for artists like Suriosubroto, Pirngadie, and Wakidi who she

Hague: W. Van Hoeve, 1955) and John Smail, "On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Modern Southeast Asia," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2, no 2 (1961): 72 – 102.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>336</sup> For instance, see Seng Yu Jin, "The Primacy of Exhibitionary Discourses: Contemporaneity in Southeast Asian Art, 1992-2002," in *Intersecting Histories Contemporary Turns in Southeast Asian Art* (Singapore: School of Art, Design, and Media, Nanyang Technological University, 2012), 116-125.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>337</sup> George McT. Kahin, "Cornell's Modern Indonesia Project," Indonesia no. 48 (October 1989): 1-26.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>338</sup> The Cultural Polemic refers to a series of exchanges that began in 1935 between different authors over a range of issues related to the formation of a national culture. The first two essays part of this exchange generally receive the most attention and were written by Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana and Sanusi Pane respectively. In 1948, the most significant essays part of this debate was published as a volume titled *Polemik Kebudayaan* (The Polemics on Culture). In her book Holt refers to these exchanges as the "Great Debate," another reference that has become common when speaking about the Cultural Polemic.

categorized as part of an "old generation" of landscape painters who painted in the Mooi Indie style.<sup>339</sup> In the words of art historian Aminudin TH Siregar, these painters "pass[ed] down the colonial way of seeing the Indonesian landscape" identic with the Mooi Indie style, marked by panoramic views and idealized depictions of Indonesia's countryside.<sup>340</sup>

Only recently have scholars begun to pay attention to the biographies of "the old generation" to construct a more nuanced understanding of modernism's development in Indonesia prior to the formation of an independent republic.<sup>341</sup> The biography of Wakidi reconstructed in this chapter contributes to this larger project of nuancing the history of modern art in Indonesia. His biography has notable departures from that of his peers that complicates the standard narrative of this "old generation" and the landscape paintings that they created. Like Suriosubroto and Pirngadie, Wakidi created landscape paintings that mimic the Mooi Indie style. However, the unique context in which Wakidi was active and the sites that he depicted encourage consideration of the factors that contribute to the meaning of a particular landscape as a site of social significance. These questions are in line with the thinking of scholars who have in recent decades engaged with similar questions surrounding landscape as genre, medium, and theory.<sup>342</sup> An examination of Wakidi's early life and training, further consideration of his inclusion in Holt's monograph, and an analysis of how he depicted Alam Minangkabau, will highlight absences in how his biography has been understood until now that are critical to an understanding of his reception in West Sumatra and amongst contemporary artists associated with Minangkabau like Erizal AS.

# Wakidi: A Short Biography

Unlike the other members of Holt's "old generation," Wakidi was not born into an aristocratic family that would have afforded him access to networks in the Indies and Europe.<sup>343</sup> Nor was he born in a region that was a central part of the colonial art world. Wakidi's father, Towijoyo, and his mother, Sairah, were migrants from the city of Semarang, Central Java, who made their way to present-day South Sumatra, near the city of Palembang, sometime before Wakidi's birth in the area

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>339</sup> Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 193.; In this analysis I refer to only three artists associated with the *Mooi Indie* aesthetic including: Suriosubroto, Pirngadi, and Wakidi. This ignores figures like Basuki Abdullah (1915–93), Suriosubroto's son, who depending on the text is also classified as a proponent of the *Mooi Indie* style. My choice is to follow the convention set by Claire Holt referenced here. Further, by referring only to these artists my focus is on those artists whose paintings were predominantly landscapes rather than other subjects also considered a part of the *Mooi Indie* style like romanticized depictions of the female form, a theme that was dominant in Basuki Abdullah's work.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>340</sup> Aminudin TH Siregar, "Painting Darek," 33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>341</sup> One example of this is Matthew Cox's (2015) dissertation on the Javanese self in portraiture that engages with the lives of both Suriosubroto and Pirngadie.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>342</sup> Here I am referring to scholars and volumes such as Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory* (1996), W.J.T. Mitchell's essay in his volume *Landscape and Power* (2002), Rachael Ziady DeLue et al.'s volume *Landscape Theory* (2008), Denis E. Cosgrove's *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (1984), and J.B. Jackson's *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (1984). <sup>343</sup> Abdullah Suriosubroto or Raden Abdullah Surio Soebroto was the son of Wahidin Soedirohoesodo. Today, Soedirohoesodo is considered a National Hero of Indonesia for his role as the first leader of Budi Utomo, the first native political society in the Dutch East Indies. Suriosubroto began his education at the medical school in Batavia before later traveling to the Netherlands where he enrolled in the Academy of Fine Arts to study painting. In contrast, Raden Mas Pirngadie was born into an aristocratic family in Banyumas, Central Java. While he did not study in Europe like Suriosubroto, he studied under notable figures like the Dutch painter Fredericus van Rossum du Chattel in the Dutch East Indies. He eventually became a civil servant, traveled throughout the archipelago along with J.E. Jasper to document indigenous technical art and applied arts, and worked for the Royal Batavian Society for Arts and Sciences as well as the Archaeological Service.

of Plaju in 1889.<sup>344</sup> There they earned their living as farmers. Wakidi's childhood had an impact on his interest in the natural world. He went to school in the morning with his brother Rainu. After school and on holidays he helped his father in the *sawah* (rice field).<sup>345</sup> His talent for drawing was evident early on as was his affinity for depicting the area that surrounded his family's village.<sup>346</sup> It is likely because of this talent that in 1904, after traveling to Bukittinggi, he was able to gain admission to the city's Kweekschool.<sup>347</sup>

During the colonial era, Kweekschool were initially established as institutes to train teachers for lower-level elementary or village schools. By the turn of the twentieth century, it was also the case that graduates of these schools could become colonial administrators. Bukittinggi's Kweekschool opened in 1856 and underwent significant reorganization in 1872, after which it was referred to popularly as Sekolah Radja (School of Kings).<sup>348</sup> Throughout its history, students came from all parts of the island, and by the time that Wakidi was admitted, it was considered to be the most prestigious educational institution in the region.<sup>349</sup> Until the declaration and implementation of Queen Wilhelmina's Ethical Policy in 1901, admission to any type of European school was limited to a select few.<sup>350</sup> In general, this meant the children of native officials who were employed by the colonial regime. As a student there, Wakidi thus became part of a select sector of society, which allowed for a certain level of upward mobility that would not have been possible otherwise. Because the school's goal was to produce teachers and administrators, art did not constitute a major portion of a student's studies. Instead, subjects like language (ranging from Dutch to what were referred to as vernacular languages, such as Javanese, Madurese, and Malay), arithmetic, geography, and history took precedence.<sup>351</sup> What instruction in art that did exist was oriented towards technical skills to train pupils to become draughtsman, work in military or administrative positions, or become educators. A description of the art training at Bukittinggi's Kweekschool recalls the type of training that art historian John Clark associates with a workshop setting marked by the transfer of a technical skill rather than knowledge of other art styles with which the skill could then be associated.<sup>352</sup> This is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>344</sup> Syafril, "Tema Realitas Sosial Pada Lukisan Wakidi," (MA thesis, Bandung Institute of Technology, 2004), 60.; A newspaper article from *Waspada* published in September 1979 notes that Wakidi's parents were mine workers (*buruh tambang*). This specific detail is not mentioned in Syafril's more nuanced description of Wakidi's early life that instead refers to them as farmers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>345</sup> Syafril, "Tema Realitas Sosial Pada Lukisan Wakidi," 61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>346</sup> Ibid.; A newspaper article from *Suara Karya* published in March 1979 by Suisanna Darmawai notes that Wakidi studied drawing as early as elementary school.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>347</sup> Syafril (2004) notes that Wakidi traveled to Bukittinggi because of a conflict with his parents (61). It is not clear whether Wakidi set out for Bukittinggi after securing admission to the city's *Kweekschool* or if this came after his arrival. <sup>348</sup> Elizabeth Graves (1981) notes that this nickname was likely derived either from the Acehnese princelings sent there or because of the comportment of its Minangkabau pupils (114). Graves' book, *The Minangkabau Response to Dutch Colonial Rule in the Nineteenth-Century*, provides an in-depth history of this institution.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>349</sup> Elizabeth Graves, *The Minangkabau Response to Dutch Colonial Rule* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1981), 114.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>350</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, because of growing attention to the welfare of the indigenous population, the Ethical Policy was established. One result of this was the expansion of Western education to the native population. As Adrian Vickers (2005) notes, "In 1900, a mere 1,500 of those classified as natives went to European schools, along with 13,000 Europeans. ...By 1928, almost 75,000 Indonesians had completed Western primary education, and nearly 6,500 secondary school" (40).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>351</sup> For more on the curriculum of *Kweekschool* as well as the history of education in the Dutch East Indies more generally see Agus Suwignyo, "The Breach in the Dike: Regime Change and the Standardization of Public Primary-School Teacher Training in Indonesia (1893 – 1969)," (PhD diss., University of Leiden, 2012) and Hendrik Kroeskamp, *Early Schoolmasters in a Developing Country: A History of Experiments in School Education in 19th Century Indonesia* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>352</sup> John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 52.; The description in question, taken from a memorial volume published in 1908 in honor of this school's renaming as *Sekolah Radja* reads as follows: Each

reflected in two notebooks attributed to Wakidi that are labelled *Orang* (people) and *Ornament* respectively and appear to have been used for pedagogical purposes. For instance, a page (**fig 3.6**) from the notebook labelled *Orang* demonstrates how to draw figures by focusing on parts of their anatomy broken down geometrically. Whereas a page from the notebook labelled *Ornament* (**fig 3.7**) includes text next that reads as instructions for how student should approach a particular exercise. In this case, the production of an architectural drawing.

If it had not been for Bukittinggi's Kweekschol, it is possible that Wakidi would not have embarked on the path that he did. His education brought him to Bukittinggi, where he lived for most of his life. It also prepared him not to become an artist but an educator. The greatest departures in Wakidi's biography from that of Suriosubroto and Pirngadie are the fact that Wakidi lived to see the declaration and recognition of Indonesia's independence and the reality that, as an educator, Wakidi spread his knowledge of landscape painting to his students for "sixty years or three generations." <sup>353</sup> He is the reason this genre dominated and continues to dominate West Sumatra's art world.

While a precise timeline of where Wakidi taught and when is difficult to determine, his affiliations can be traced through period sources. Wakidi had a reputation as a student with great discipline and intelligence. When he graduated from Bukittinggi's Kweekschool in 1908, he was promoted to "junior teacher" (*guru muda*) at the same institution.<sup>354</sup> He then traveled, at an unknown date, to Java for a short period where he studied to become a drawing teacher with a Dutch painter named Y. Z. Van Dijk.<sup>355</sup> According to various newspaper articles, while in Java Wakidi first studied in his parents' hometown of Semarang and then spent approximately three years teaching in Probolinggo.<sup>356</sup> Around 1915 he returned to West Sumatra and married his first wife.<sup>357</sup> From this point on, he spent the rest of his career teaching in various sites, including Bukittinggi and Kayutanam, in West Sumatra, and Palembang and Bengkulu, in South Sumatra.<sup>358</sup> When he finally

week, each class studies drawing for two hours. First and second rank students copy objects that are commonly found in Sumatra as well as simple patterns. These objects are drawn with pencil while the patterns are done with charcoal and later colored with paint. These drawings are done in high-quality drawing books so that they can be used later if a student becomes a teacher. In this way, the student creates a collection of drawings that are high-quality and standardized. Third rank students learn to draw objects directly without an example, starting from wire forms, after that blocks, then easy objects that one encounters everywhere. At *Sekolah Radja* there is a large drawing studio, complete with all the necessary tools.; *Gedenkboek Samengesteldbij Gelegenheid V an Het 35 jarig Bestaan Der Kweekschool V oor Inlandsche Onderwijzers Te Fort De Kock = Kitab Peringatan Terkarang Waktoe Telah 35 Tahoen 'Oemoer Sekolah-Radja Oentoek Goeroe Melajoe Di Boekit-Tinggi (Arnhem, 1908), 52.* 

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>353</sup> Oesman Effendi, "Gerakan Seni Lukis di Sumatera Barat," *Budaya Jaya*, no. 100, TH. IX (September 1976).
 <sup>354</sup> Syafril, "Tema Realitas Sosial Pada Lukisan Wakidi," 62.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>355</sup> Other Mooi Indie artists like Suriosubroto and Pirngadie studied with foreign artists of relative note for which biographical information exists. In contrast, the only reference to Van Dijk that I have found is a volume published in 1922 titled *Garoet en Omstreken: Zwerftochten door de Preanger* (Garoet and its Surroundings: Wanderings in the Preanger). This volume is a travel guide for West Java, highlighting key sites such as the region's volcanic craters and lakes along with practical information like the price to rent cars, horses, or sedans. At the front of this volume is a single image attributed to Van Dijk that is reminiscent of many of Wakidi's drawings of women. In this image, Van Dijk depicts a young woman, possibly of mixed heritage or Chinese, indicated by the woman's top and a parasol with Chinese characters around its edges. This image is also included in Leo Haks and Guus Maris' *Lexicon of Foreign Artists who Visualized Indonesia, 1600 – 1950*, albeit without any additional biographical information regarding Van Dijk.; SH/Wall Paragoan, "In Memoriam Wakidi: Pelukis yang Sederhana," *Sinar Harapan*, January 10, 1980, 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>356</sup> Suisanna Darmawi, "Menemui Wakidi: Pelukis Naturalis yang Konsekwen,"; "Mengenal Pelukis Wakidi," *Waspada,* SH/Wall Paragoan, "In Memoriam Wakidi: Pelukis yang Sederhana."

<sup>357 &</sup>quot;Mengenal Pelukis Wakidi," Waspada.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>358</sup> Syafril (2004) notes that Wakidi went to Palembang in 1942 and Bengkulu in 1943. Both assignments were short, as he returned to West Sumatra to teach at INS Kayutanam in 1943 (65). Idran Wakidi (2014) writes, quoting one of his

received his retirement from the state, he did not stop teaching.<sup>359</sup> Various sources show that Wakidi continued to teach for decades at high schools in Bukittinggi. In addition, he held small group lessons at his home in the same city.<sup>360</sup> Many of Wakidi's students in turn, became teachers at these same institutions where Wakidi's legacy can still be seen today.

# Wakidi's Depiction of Alam Minangkabau

When Wakidi migrated to West Sumatra his destination was Bukittinggi. This city is in the heartland of Minangkabau described in this chapter's introduction. It is also located next to Kota Gadang, Oesman Effendi's village of birth discussed in chapter two. Today, Bukittinggi is the third largest city in Minangkabau. It is situated within the Bukit Barisan Mountain range that runs the length of the western side of Sumatra. This mountain range is comprised primarily of volcanoes, like Mount Marapi and Mount Singgalang, that form a striking backdrop for this city and have over time played a central role in shaping this region's physical landscape. Today, West Sumatra's administrative center is the coastal city of Padang. Bukittinggi had that role under the Dutch, however. This contributed to its cosmopolitan character. During his lifetime, Wakidi lived at the center of Bukittinggi, just below the city's central square where the iconic Jam Gadang (Big Clock) and the city's central market are located.<sup>361</sup> As one source notes, Wakidi never owned a car and instead preferred to ride his bike wherever he went because it allowed him to observe the countryside and to stop and make sketches of what he encountered.<sup>362</sup> As evidenced by a photograph (fig 3.8) of Bukittinggi from the 1930s, Sianok Canyon-a site that is now one of the most iconic sites for painters in and from Minangkabau—is only a short bicycle ride from the city's center. It is likely because of this that this site figures heavily in his repertoire.

The painting Ngarai Sianok (Sianok Canyon) (fig 3.9) created in the 1940s, is one of the bestpreserved examples of Wakidi's ability to capture the tranquility of West Sumatra's countryside. The style and subject matter of Ngarai Sianok resonates with Mooi Indie landscapes. The composition contains small structures at the foot of the canyon, some of which are barely discernible, along with a single figure clad in red that stands in the doorway of the largest structure on the left slide of the painting. The painting's vantage point provides a panoramic view that diminishes the presence of human intervention on the landscape at the same time that it creates an idealized representation of the site. Wakidi indicates that this is a site of rice agriculture through the faint division of rice

interviewees, Yazid, that Wakidi received an invitation from Adam Malik, who was vice-president under Suharto to come to Jakarta, however, Wakidi was not interested in leaving West Sumatra (66).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>359</sup> Conflicting information exists regarding when Wakidi received his pension from the state. Suisanna Darmawai (1979) notes that Wakidi received his pension in 1940. However, in an article published in August of the same year Darmawai then states that Wakidi received his pension in 1958. These are in turn, in conflict with A.A. Navis (1996) who states that Wakidi received his pension in 1935, after which he taught at INS Kayutanam (22 n28).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>360</sup> Idran Wakidi, "Wakidi dan Perkembangan Pendidikan Seni Lukis di Sumatra Barat" (MA thesis, Padang State University 2014), 65.; In this thesis Idran includes quotes from various interviewees that indicate what type of person his father was. As a teacher he was very serious, however, when he taught small groups at his house, he often talked at length about how to live a good life instructing his students to eat vegetables every day and avoid too much meat. Further, when he held these lessons, he did so free of charge. Lessons were held on Sunday from 3 – 6PM. Besides teaching drawing, he also taught music including piano, viola, and guitar.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>361</sup> Wakidi's house is located at Jl. Pemuda 2A, Bukittinggi. This address is immediately across the street from the movie theater "Bioskop ERI." In 2017, when I visited this house, it was still standing but not inhabited. The Jam Gadang was a gift to Bukittinggi in 1926 from Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands. Today it is synonymous with this city and thus, an iconic site visited by tourists from within the region and beyond.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>362</sup> Suisanna Darmawi, "Menemui Wakidi: Pelukis Naturalis yang Konsekwen."

paddies on each side of the river, which occupies the painting's foreground and leads to a lone cliff standing at the center of the painting. The rice paddies are, however, secondary to the painting's primary subject matter, the cliff known as Tabiang Takuruang that is accentuated by Wakidi's preoccupation with light and shadow.

Art historian and Wakidi's student Nashbahry Couto notes that Wakidi never used rough and expressive brushstrokes. Instead, he first sketched with a sharp pencil and then used a small flat brush to apply oil paint. This process is not unlike the technique of creating a watercolor. Wakidi built up his compositions layer by layer to emphasize the way that the light hits rocks, canyon walls, and fields as is the case in this painting's foreground.<sup>363</sup> To achieve this he divided his palette into "light," "shadow," and "contour" colors instead of thinking in terms of greens, browns, or reds.<sup>364</sup> This enabled him to achieve a softer gradation of color and to capture the atmosphere of late afternoon. This preference is visible in Ngarai Sianok and Lembah Ngarai (Canyon Valley) (fig 3.10), which Wakidi created in 1977, just two years prior to his passing. Lembah Ngarai also depicts Sianok Canyon, albeit from a different perspective than in his other works.<sup>365</sup> It does not include Tabiang Takuruang but places focus on Mount Singgalang. Similar to Ngarai Sianok, the vantage point in Lembah Ngarai provides a panoramic view of the canyon. The small structures on the floor of the canyon are inconsequential in comparison to the top of the canyon that is bathed in light, the canyon walls, the forest covered in shadow in the painting's foreground, and Mount Singgalang at the painting's center. Visual analysis of these paintings shows that the environment or natural features that define Sianok Canyon are again central to Wakidi's work, emphasized by his attention to light and shadow.

Today, Wakidi is best known for his paintings like *Ngarai Sianok* and *Lembah Ngarai* that follow the convention of Mooi Indie landscape paintings. The popularity of these works can be attributed to three factors. First, Wakidi's larger scale works that are most well-known are all landscapes in which the scale of the figures is minimized in such a way that they become a mere addition to the scene rather than its focus. Only a handful of Wakidi's paintings, such as *Pekerja Wanita* (Working Woman) (**fig 3.11**), stray from this convention.<sup>366</sup> Paintings like *Pekerja Wanita* underline the second factor that has contributed to Wakidi's inseparability from landscape; Wakidi was far more skilled at depicting landscapes than figures, like the woman at the center of *Pekerja Wanita*. From this woman's stance to her facial features, the figure lacks a certain level of precision that one expects from an artist skilled in realist depictions of the human form. Finally, the third factor that has contributed to Wakidi was a landscape painter takes us back to Holt.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>363</sup> Nashbahry Couto, "Beberapa Karya Wakidi," *Nashbahry-Paint Visual Heritage Blog*, last modified January 19, 2011, accessed March 28, 2023, <u>http://visualheritageblognasbahry.blogspot.com/2011/01/beberapa-karya-wakidi.html</u>.
 <sup>364</sup> Nashbahry Couto, "Beberapa Karya Wakidi."; Idran Wakidi, "Wakidi dan Perkembangan Pendidikan Seni Lukis di Sumatera Barat," (MA thesis, Padang State University, 2014), 65.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>365</sup> There is some controversy surrounding this painting as some believe that Wakidi did not paint it. Rather, they suggest one of his sons did and have attributed it to their father. In October 2017, when I visited Idran Wakidi at his home in Padang, West Sumatra I saw a version of this painting that was not complete. He explained that his father did not finish it before he passed away. This confirms the fact that Wakidi created multiple reproductions of a single painting and could have created the version that is part of the National Gallery's collection in Jakarta as well as the one that remained in Padang. In addition to this I also encountered sketches that appear to be studies for this painting in Fadli Zon's collection that includes the largest archive of Wakidi's works on paper.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>366</sup> Other examples of paintings that do not focus solely on the landscape include *Penggilingan Padi* (Rice Mill) and *Balai Adat* (Adat Hall). Both paintings are part of Sukarno's collection. In the Fadli Zon Library I located a drawing that appears to be a study for the former, however, neither are dated. The latter is dated 1950-54

Wakidi's house was the first stop on Holt's tour to West Sumatra in September 1956.<sup>367</sup> By this point Wakidi was sixty-seven years old. He was regarded as the most senior artist in the region and recognized on a national scale. His works were in President Sukarno's collection, which likely prompted Holt to pay him special attention in her monograph. The other artists that she visited in West Sumatra and other parts of the island, including Medan in North Sumatra and Palembang in South Sumatra, are relegated to a mere footnote in which she points to the reality that no Indonesian artist "had attained national stature."<sup>368</sup> She names Wakidi alongside members of the "old generation" of landscape painters but does not elaborate on the extent of his activities or his interests and commitments as an artist. Instead, the reader only learns that he produced landscape paintings and that some of his students had become commercial landscape painters in Medan, North Sumatra.<sup>369</sup>

The existing archive of Wakidi's work indicates that he also had a keen interest in and affection for Minangkabau. For example, in a self-portrait (**fig 3.12**) drawn with ink on paper Wakidi depicts himself leaning against the wall of a rumah gadang (matrifocal longhouse). This drawing appears to be based off a photograph taken by Holt (**fig 3.13**).<sup>370</sup> In contrast to the photograph that served as a reference for Wakidi's representation of his own likeness, this drawing shows him leaning against a wall covered in carvings like those found on the façade of rumah gadang. These carvings are constituted by motifs including those discussed in this dissertation's introduction that I describe as the visual translation of Minangkabau proverbs that portray adat teachings. Behind Wakidi to the right of this structure, two women wearing *baju kurung* (long shirt worn by women across the Malay world) walk along a path leading away from another longhouse. Across Wakidi's small drawings and watercolors, details such as the rumah gadang and baju kurung consistently situate his work in Minangkabau.

Wakidi was not ethnically Minangkabau. Born to Javanese parents, Wakidi was a migrant. He left South Sumatra at a young age and chose to live his life in West Sumatra. He was married twice, both times to women from Minangkabau, and had fifteen children.<sup>371</sup> Unlike his male counterparts in Minangkabau he was thus, not beholden to the same cultural expectations that they were dictated by Minangkabau adat such as the imperative to leave Minangkabau or merantau. This in turn, afforded Wakidi the opportunity to immerse himself in the daily activities of those around him. He educated himself about the particularities of Minangkabau adat and engaged local culture in such works as *Cincin Tando* (Ring Sign) (**fig 3.14**), a small drawing that portrays part of an engagement ceremony.<sup>372</sup> He also dedicated himself to the study of the region's landscapes through his attention

 $<sup>^{367}</sup>$  Two small notebooks are included in the Claire Holt Papers at Cornell University that document her time in Sumatra (primarily West Sumatra) from roughly September 17 – 23, 1956.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>368</sup> Other stops on her tour of West Sumatra related to our understanding of this region's visual art world included a visit with members of the artist association SEMI including Zetka and Betty and a visit with Muhammad Sjafei, the founder of INS Kayutanam. Regarding her reference to artists who had not yet attained national stature, a footnote at the end of her last chapter documents what she referred to as the "most important organizations in Sumatra." These included ASRI or *Angkatan Seni Rupa Indonesia* (Fine Arts Group of Indonesia) in Medan and SEMI or *Seniman Indonesia Muda* (Young Indonesian Artists) in Bukittinggi (254n23).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>369</sup> Claire Holt, Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change, 194.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>370</sup> This photograph is included on a small contact sheet with photographic documentation of Holt's visit to Wakidi's house. Along with three photographs of Wakidi and his wife are five photographs of landscape paintings including *Dataran Mahat* discussed later in this chapter. These paintings are dated between 1952 – 1956 and like *Dataran Mahat*, are exemplary of Wakidi's interest in afternoon light.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>371</sup> One news article notes that Wakidi's first wife passed away in 1950 (Wartawan MIR, 1972). Another news article notes that Wakidi married his second wife in 1952 and notes how many children he had (Darmawi, 1979).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>372</sup> In Minangkabau, as in other cultures across Indonesia, the process of engagement and marriage follows a particular formula. For Minangkabau, the first step is *batimbang tando* (exchange of signs) during which the man makes an initial

to light and shadow. This act was not just motivated by his technical interests. It should also be seen in relation Wakidi's efforts to capture his own experience of alam that was informed by his relationship to a higher power.

As Wakidi's son Idran recounts in a retelling of his father's life, Wakidi was drawn to a certain type of light that he viewed as a product of God's greatness.<sup>373</sup> To capture the sacred aura of this light, he spent days at a time observing a particular site and its environment. As a teacher, he imparted this process to his students, directing them to study the natural world so that they might become closer to it.<sup>374</sup> Thus, while Wakidi's landscape paintings follow certain conventions that are characteristic of the Mooi Indie style, primarily the use of a vantage point that diminishes the presence or intervention of humans, his romanticism was rooted in motivations that diverged from those of the colonial landscape painters that Sudjojono critiqued because of their devotion to the commercial market. Today, amongst contemporary Minangkabau-born artists Wakidi's legacy is not only inseparable from the specific sites that he depicted, but also his ability to capture the atmosphere of Alam Minangkabau that was rooted in his own devotion to God or Allah, as he is described as a devout Muslim.<sup>375</sup> Although ethnically Wakidi was an outsider in Minangkabau his identification with Islam made him an insider. This is because in Minangkabau identity is informed by the synthesis of adat and Islam both of which are understood to have a connection to alam.

### Alam and the Center of the Minangkabau World, Redefining Landscape

The majority of Wakidi's landscape paintings depict sites in the Minangkabau heartland (**Map 3.1**) described in this chapter's introduction. These range from Sianok Canyon and the Harau Valley to lakes like Singkarak and Maninjau. They are sites that have long served as the backdrop for tourist photographs because of their beauty. More importantly, however, they hold symbolic import in Minangkabau because of their location in an area that is recognized as the birthplace of Minangkabau. Until now, the heartland of Minangkabau is special, even sacred, because it was here that Minangkabau adat was first conceptualized. It is still thought to be the place where Minangkabau adat is strongest.<sup>376</sup> Because of this, landscapes like Sianok Canyon as well as the vista that inspired Erizal AS' *Hamparan Sawah, Bukit Barisan, Danau & Pelangi Sore Itu* (Field, Barisan Mountains, Lake & Rainbow that Afternoon) (**fig 3.1**) are imbued with meaning of both a cultural (i.e., Minangkabau) and religious nature.

As described in this dissertation's introduction some Minangkabau born philosophers like M. Nasroen attribute the unlikely synthesis of adat and Islam in Minangkabau to the connection of each with alam. In the words of M. Nasroen when Islam came to Minangkabau it was able to coexist with adat because, "Minangkabau adat had always been based on certainties contained in nature or the wisdom that nature acts as our teacher, while in the Qur'an, God indicates that He reveals some

proposal to a woman. After this, the woman's family visits the man's house to make the engagement official. This drawing depicts a young man holding out an object, presumably a ring, to a young woman seated on a rock. This along with the traditional attire that each figure is wearing indicates that a formal ceremony is taking place. <sup>373</sup> Idran Wakidi, "Wakidi dan Perkembangan Pendidikan Seni Lukis di Sumatra Barat," 65-66.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>376</sup> Taufik Abdullah's description cited above of how the Minangkabau world emerged and subsequently developed is where I draw this idea from. In this description he goes onto to explain how the initial leaders of Minangkabau established rules for society (185 – 190).

of His secrets through nature to those who can interpret nature properly."<sup>377</sup> Put differently Islam was seen as adat's perfected form.<sup>378</sup> This chapter engages critically with the term "alam" to show that adat has played a central part in how artists across generations from Wakidi in the mid-twentieth century to Erizal AS in the present day relate to and in turn, construct an understanding of the natural world through their production of landscape paintings.

In Indonesia, including in Minangkabau, the most common translation of alam that I encountered in everyday interactions is "nature." However, this is but one translation of this term, which comes from the Arabic verbal noun *'ilm*, meaning "knowledge," and thus signifies "that by which one knows."<sup>379</sup> Jeffrey Hadler defines the term as a Sufi notion that denotes realms of perception.<sup>380</sup> In other words, while the natural world, or what we know as "nature" constitutes a tangible facet of alam, the concept is also inseparable from intangible realms like the mind and our senses. In Minangkabau the varied facets of alam that are both tangible and intangible are looked to as a teacher that is created continuously. This idea is captured in the adage, "nature acts as our teacher" (*alam takambang jadi guru*). Alam is not God but of God. It is to be respected and learned from.<sup>381</sup> This reverence for God through alam is exemplified by a drawing (**fig 3.15**) that is attributed to Muhammad Sjafei (1893–1966), a nationalist artist and intellectual associated with Minangkabau.

From a small notebook that contains mostly sketches of natural settings, Sjafei's drawing done with ink on paper depicts a young man. He is wearing a *peci* (hat worn by men across Muslim Southeast Asia) and kneels on a small rug in the middle of a forest clearing. His head is bowed, and his eyes are closed. His hands are raised with palms facing upward towards the sky. Above him, the Arabic word for God is placed at the center of the drawing with five rays of light that fall on the earth and the man's head. The effect, a synthesis between the young man or humans, nature, and God. Sjafei is noteworthy for a study of art in West Sumatra because he founded a school known as INS Kayutanam in 1926 that not only included art in its curriculum but also was shaped by the synthesis between God, nature, and man that is depicted in this drawing.<sup>382</sup>

Like Wakidi, Sjafei was not Minangkabau born. He was adopted by Minangkabau born nationalist leader Mara Soetan and brought to West Sumatra from Kalimantan as a child.<sup>383</sup> Sjafei's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>377</sup> M. Nasroen, *Dasar Falsafah Adat Minangkabau* (Jakarta: C.V. Penerbit 'Pasaman', 1957), 25-27.; Taufik Abdullah, "Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau," *Indonesia* 2 (October 1966), 3. <sup>378</sup> Ibid., 25-27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>379</sup> A.L. Samian, "Forces of the Cosmos in Alam Minangkabau: A Phenomenological Perspective," in *Analecta Husserliana: The Yearbook of Phenomenological Researched Volume*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, vol. CXV (New York: Springer, 2015), 243.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>380</sup> Jeffrey Hadler, *Muslims and Matriarchs: Cultural Resilience in Indonesia through Jihad and Colonialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 148 fn36

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>381</sup> A.L. Samian, "Forces of the Cosmos in Alam Minangkabau: A Phenomenological Perspective," 243-244.
 <sup>382</sup> When it was founded INS Kayutanam's full name was Ruang Pendidik Indonesisch Nederlandsche School Kayutanam. While the inclusion of the inclusion of "Nederlandsche" (Dutch) in the school's name suggests that it was a Dutch-run institution, it was in fact quite the opposite. The term "ruang pendidik" referred to the idea that I.N.S. Kayutanam was a space (*ruang*) without limitations where teaching and learning (*pendidik*) took place freely between teachers and students (Navis 1996, 60).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>383</sup> Muhammad Sjafei, born in Kalimantan and thus not of Minangkabau descent was the adopted son of Mara Soetan (Suryadi 2014). Born in Kayutanam, Soetan was an educator and nationalist leader, part of organizations including *Budi Utomo* (Noble Endeavour), the first Indonesian nationalist organization founded in 1908 as well as the *Indische Partij* (Indies Party). This is notable because Soetan's affiliations had a marked impact on Sjafei and opened important networks to him. Like Wakidi, Sjafei began his formal education at Bukittinggi's *Kweekschool* where he studied under Wakidi (Navis 1996). In 1914, when he graduated, he traveled to Jakarta where he taught at a Kartini School, referring to schools that were established to provide educational opportunities to indigenous girls. He also continued his study of art under H.J. de Graaf who was at that time, a drawing teacher at the *Hogere Burgerschool* (Higher Civic School) or HBS. After 18 months, this resulted in a certificate that provided him with the credentials to teach drawing (Navis 1996, 18).

impetus for forming INS Kayutanam was rooted in his desire to develop an alternative model of education specific to Sumatra that would serve the needs of the local population. INS Kayutanam has been compared to the Tamansiswa schools founded just a few years prior in Java.<sup>384</sup> Like Tamansiswa, art was central to INS' curriculum that was designed in such a way as to create "active" humans (not just learners), that would contribute to the development of the nation. At INS this pedagogical approach was rooted in adherence to the understanding that the natural world (alam) is itself "active"-always in the process of growth and development-and thus, as the creation of God almighty, integral to learning.<sup>385</sup> In other words, upholding the idea that nature is our teacher. At INS learning was divided into four areas including academic (akademik), practical (ketrampilan), spiritual (kerohanian), and student-based (siswa) subjects. While each area was seen to have its own purpose and significance, each was also integral to the development of a well-rounded student capable of contributing to society. Art, which included visual arts (seni rupa), literary arts (seni sastra), dramatic arts (seni drama) and musical arts (seni music) fell under the umbrella of spiritual education alongside sport (olah raga) and religion (agama).<sup>386</sup> Together, these areas were seen to shape the mental attitude of students.<sup>387</sup> In its earliest years Sjafei along with Wakidi were INS Kayutanam's art teachers. This school is thus, one of the many sites in West Sumatra where Wakidi's presence contributed to the dissemination of the landscape painting genre in Minangkabau. Wakidi's embodiment of INS Kayutanam's pedagogical orientation can be seen in his son Idran's statement regarding Wakidi's interest in and understanding of light. Wakidi would sit for hours anticipating the precise moment when the light changed. It was this that he sought to capture in his depictions of Alam Minangkabau. He did not focus on the static characteristics of landscapes. Rather, he was interested in how the "active" character of nature impacts our perception of a particular landscape.

Scholars acknowledge that the spiritual or sacred character of land and the landscapes across Southeast Asia is integral to an understanding of culture and history. Studies abound on the ways

<sup>385</sup> Muhammad Sjafei, *Tujuan Pendikan dan Pengadjaran* (Padang: Multilith Sridharma N.V., 1956).

According to one of Sjafei's students who compiled a biography of Sjafei, he was the first person to receive this type of certificate in the Dutch East Indies (Syamsulbahar 1980, 9). In Jakarta, Sjafei served as the leader of all the branches of the Insulinde Party outside of Java for five years. Where the Insulinde Party, founded in 1909, was a direct successor of the Indische Party, one of the first political organizations in the Dutch East Indies that promoted Indonesian nationalism. In 1919, this party became the Nationale Indische Party (National Indies Party), the predecessor of Sukarno's Indonesian National Party (PNI). Sjafei's involvement with the Insulinde Party was formative. From it he developed the opinion that people often enter political parties with no real political awareness and those who made sincere contributions to the political struggle were those that were educated. As such, to help advance the nationalist cause and foster a political consciousness, Sjafei realized that the best route was to establish a school that would help to instill political awareness (Syamsulbahar 1980, 9-10). To help himself achieve this goal in 1922, he traveled to the Netherlands with a set of questions he felt he needed to answer. First, how did the Netherlands, as such a small country in the midst of so many other countries who also had the desire to colonize others, maintain its position for so long? Second, if he was going to help Indonesia through education and teaching, he wanted to understand the association between nature, history, position, soul, culture/adat (local custom), politics (economic or state), and intuition (Syamsulbahar 1980, 10). After three years in the Netherlands, he returned to Indonesia and shortly thereafter, despite numerous offers for what at the time were highly regarded positions difficult to come by for most Indonesians including a lectureship in Malay at the University of Leiden, the role of Chief Editor of the publishing house Balai Pustaka, and Adjunct Inspector of all Bumiputera schools across Indonesia, in 1926, Sjafei established INS Kayutanam (Syamsulbahar 1980, 11).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>384</sup> The Tamansiswa schools, founded in 1922 by nationalist Ki Hadjar Dewantara, was an education movement based in Yogyakarta, Java. Its pedagogical orientation stressed the importance of student-centered learning and the combination of both Indonesian and foreign cultural values. For more on Tamansiswa see David Radcliffe, "Ki Hadjar Dewantara and the Taman Siswa Schools: Notes on the Extra-Colonial Theory of Education," *Comparative Education Review* 15, no 2 (June 1971): 219-226.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>386</sup> A.A. Navis, *Filsafat dan Strategi Pendidikan M.Sjafei: Ruang Pendidik INS Kayutanam* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1996), 122.
 <sup>387</sup> As Navis (1996) explains, art was understood to refine feeling, sport instilled tenacity, and religion contributed to an understanding of ethics and morality (122).

that knowledge systems that predate the arrival of world religions contributed to particular worldviews and such practices as the worship of natural elements and organic forms like bodies of water or rocks.<sup>388</sup> Notably, however, little attention has been paid to localized terminologies or understanding of the natural world in analyses of Indonesian landscape painting. When sacred elements of the natural world figure in the work of art historians, it is of a more general character. For example, in her study of contemporary artists in Java, Astri Wright uses such symbols as the mountain and tree as a frame through which to think about the relationship of local culture to the development of modern and contemporary art practices in Indonesia in the post-independence period.<sup>389</sup> Sacred elements of the natural world are pertinent to Minangkabau artists as indicated by the relationship of adat and alam. And alam continues to figure heavily in discourse on landscape painting in and amongst artists associated with Minangkabau.

During my fieldwork in West Sumatra and amongst Minangkabau artists in Yogyakarta, my interlocutors often used the phrase "lukisan alam" (alam painting). This occurred both in broader discussions about the history of the landscape painting genre in this region and specific conversations surrounding what motivated a particular artist to reference this genre in their contemporary practice. The term "lukisan alam" is noteworthy because it diverges from more common references to paintings that portray Indonesia's countryside as "lukisan pemandangan," which implies a view or something that is looked at, or "lukisan Mooi Indie," which references the colonial legacy of the landscape genre.<sup>390</sup> In contrast to these terms, the use of alam opens a space of analysis that includes both the physical landscape that is portrayed in a given painting and the cultural landscape that informs an artist's engagement with it. By referring to their paintings as "lukisan alam" rather than "lukisan Mooi Indie," Minangkabau artists deliberately signal a departure from "colonial ways of seeing." They also firmly root their work in relation to Minangkabau adat because of the relationship of adat to alam. When Erizal returned to West Sumatra the landscapes that he chose to depict were intentional. This is exemplified by the physical landscape depicted in this photograph (fig 3.16) that served as Erizal's reference for Hamparan Sawan, Bukit Barisan, Danau & Pelagi Sore Itu. This vista is observable from the hillside located above the village of Pariangan. As referenced in this chapter's introduction, according to Tambo Pariangan is the original settlement of Minangkabau. In other words, it is the center of Alam Minangkabau.

### Erizal AS' Contemporary Depictions of Alam Minangkabau

Erizal was born in the town of Padang Panjang, West Sumatra, but he has called the city of Yogyakarta in Java home since the late 1990s. After completing his studies at West Sumatra's Fine Art's High School (Sekolah Menengah Seni Rupa, SMSR), Erizal migrated to Yogyakarta to pursue

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>388</sup> Two studies that are particularly useful include Catherine Allerton's examination of the Manggarai region of eastern Indonesian in which she proposes the term "spiritual landscape," and Barbara Watson Andaya's study of waterways in which she proposes the term "spiritual waterscapes."; See these and others including: Barbara Watson Andaya, "Rivers, Oceans, and Spirits: Water Cosmologies, Gender, and Religious Change in Southeast Asia," *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and National Studies of Southeast Asia* 4, no. 2 (2016): 239-263.; Catherine Allerton, *Potent Landscapes: Place and Mobility in Eastern Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013).; Kaj Arhem and Guido Sprenger, eds., *Animism in Southeast Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2016).; Peter Boomgaard, ed., *A World or Water: Rain, Rivers, and Seas in Southeast Asian Histories,*" (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007).; and a special issue of *Anthropological Forum* 19, no. 3 (2009).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>389</sup> Following Claire Holt, Wright's monograph was the second major study of Indonesian art history to be published in English and reflects what in the 1980s and 90s was a tradition of scholars trained under art historian Stanley J. O'Connor at Cornell University who engaged with ethnographic fieldwork and wrote from a cultural studies lens.; Astri Wright, *Soul, Spirit, and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994). <sup>390</sup> The root of *pemandangan* is *"pandang,"* which can be translated as "look" or "glance."

his undergraduate studies at ISI Yogyakarta. In this, he was like the members of the Jendela Art Group and the founding members of the Sakato Art Community discussed in chapter one who had migrated to Yogyakarta just a few years prior. Upon his arrival to Yogyakarta, Erizal became a member of Sakato, later serving as the group's leader (*ketua*). Since migrating to Yogyakarta Erizal has benefited from the infrastructure in this city as well as the connections it has provided him to gallerists and collectors in Indonesia and wider Southeast Asia. After graduating from ISI Yogyakarta in 2005, Erizal had little motivation to return to the region where he was born and decided to pursue his career as an artist in Yogyakarta. He remained in Java until the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2021, when he took the opportunity of a global lockdown to spend an extended period in West Sumatra. His purpose: to study the region's landscapes as a means to interrogate the legacy of the landscape painting genre in West Sumatra and for the history of art in Minangkabau.

Erizal had spent most of his time in Yogyakarta in the studio. Working *en plein air* therefore presented a new challenge.<sup>301</sup> During his stay in West Sumatra in 2021, Erizal committed a significant amount of time to experiencing the region's landscapes. First, he scouted out a particular landscape for his study, like the vista that inspired *Hamparan Sawah*, *Bukit Barisan*, *Danau & Pelangi Sore Itu* (**3.1**). This photograph (**fig 3.17**) depicts Erizal en *plein air* working on the painting in question. It also provides a sense of the work's scale as well as a glimpse into Erizal's process.

The highlands of West Sumatra, where Erizal was born and his parents still live, are full of agricultural vistas, lakes, volcanoes, and valleys with steep granite stone walls. After deciding on a location, Erizal spent between one and three days there, starting a canvas before returning to his studio armed with photographs and videos of the chosen site. A set of photographs that show Erizal at work (**figs. 3.18–3.21**) indicate that he utilized a range of tools and techniques, including wide brush strokes that produce the base layer for a soft sky (**fig 3.18**); various sized palette knifes to smooth out and accentuate each layer of oil paint (**fig 3.19**); and squeezing paint directly onto the canvas, which is most obvious in a photograph that shows Erizal utilizing the paint tube to create his outline of the terraced rice fields that peek out behind him (**fig 3.20**).

After starting a canvas and making initial progress on a given composition Erizal returned to a studio that he set up for himself for the duration of his stay in West Sumatra. Working on multiple canvases at once, as is his standard practice, he was able to not only put finishing touches on his landscapes but also create studies focused on and intended to capture the atmosphere that makes the intangible experience of being in nature so special yet challenging to represent. Erizal titled one such study *Gestur Jelang Senja* (Gestures of Dusk) (**fig 3.22**). This painting is an example of Erizal's complete abstraction in which the density of form, varied textures, and contrasting hues become the painting's primary subject matter. Another photograph shows Erizal painting *en plein air* at dusk against the dramatic backdrop of Sianok Canyon (**fig 3.23**). It is possible to imagine that the patches of white at the top left corner of the *Gestur Jelang Senja* as well as the bright streak of orange at the top of the canvas refer to the colors that paint a sky as the sun sets across West Sumatra's verdant landscape. Meanwhile, the thick green and black, almost tar-like forms around the painting's edges appear as the encroaching night that will shortly bathe this landscape in darkness. Analysis of these paintings and study of Erizal's process suggests that an ongoing exploration of form is central to both.

Through his exploration of line and texture, in the last two decades Erizal has steadily moved away from representational forms quite literally beyond the painting's surface. This is exemplified by *Ambitious* (**fig 3.24**), which was produced for a solo exhibition in 2019, titled *Formless Existence*. Since 2005, Erizal has had six solo exhibitions that allow us to track his shift from

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>391</sup> Erizal AS, Erizal AS Darek #1: Bentang Alam (Singapore: Gajah Gallery, 2022).

representational forms to what is now an overwhelming tendency towards complete abstraction like that which characterizes *Ambitious*. However, by only focusing on the formal aspects of Erizal's repertoire what has always been his keen interest in and awareness of sociopolitical issues is missed.

For instance, his 2016 solo exhibition was titled *Reconfiguring Portraiture*. It included portraits that were intended to represent figures in power. However, rather than a more conventional portrait where subjects are depicted realistically, in *Reconfiguring Portraiture* Erizal erased each portrait's face to assert the idea that we never really know the true character of such figures. This was followed by *Formless Existence* in 2019. Erizal's preparation for *Formless Existence* took place in the lead up to and aftermath of Indonesia's 2019 presidential election. This election pitted incumbent Joko Widodo against Prabowo Subianto. Erizal describes each of these paintings as a commentary on this context that elicited significant backlash against Minangkabau.

In West Sumatra and amongst Minangkabau in Java Subianto, who ultimately lost the election to Widodo, was the favored candidate. This preference for Subianto contrasted with a larger majority that vehemently disliked Subianto because of his connections to Suharto's New Order regime. Subianto was married to Suharto's daughter, commonly known as Titiek Suharto. Additionally, Prabowo had a military career and has been accused of human rights abuses in relation to the events surrounding East Timor. Part of Prabowo's appeal to Minangkabau has been explained by his attention to Muslim identity politics.<sup>392</sup> All of Erizal's paintings for Formless Existence were characteristic of his complete abstraction. Like other Minangkabau born artists discussed throughout this dissertation, his engagement with the political situation was subtle, achieved through his manipulation of each painting's border and title as demonstrated by Negosiasi Ruang Sempit (Negotiating a Small Space) (fig 3.25). In this work the physical placement of the canvas within the frame is key. Set ever so slightly off center it reveals a small space on the left side of the frame that is accentuated by a red backdrop. This space represents the challenges that minority groups like Minangkabau face when their viewpoints go against the mainstream. When Erizal returned to West Sumatra to devote himself to the study of its landscapes it was a politically charged act. He was not just interested in advancing his technical skills as an artist by exploring a new genre. Instead, he was focused on rewriting the narrative that has defined West Sumatra's art history. For Erizal his landscape paintings are not a continuation of the Mooi Indies style but rather reflective of West Sumatra's "traditional heritage."<sup>393</sup>

Despite their separation by nearly fifty years, Erizal and Wakidi both relied on elements of abstraction to capture the intangible facets of Alam Minangkabau in their landscape paintings. By relying on his own abstract and semi-abstract language Erizal created paintings like *Hamparan Sawah*, *Bukit Barisan, Danau & Pelangi Sore Itu* (**fig 3.2**) as well as *Gestur Jelang Senja* (Gestures of Dusk) (**fig 3.21**), both of which provide viewers with the experience of "viewing nature through a microscope."<sup>394</sup> The colors and pigments rather than specific objects become the primary subject of Erizal's paintings. This approach departs completely from the formal conventions of landscape painting and thus, rejects colonial ways of seeing associated with the Mooi Indie style.

Erizal's method of complete abstraction is exemplified in *Biru Menyambut Pagi* (Blue Greets the Morning) (**fig 3.26**) and *Energi Alam, Gerak Tak Berbatas* (Nature's Energy, Borderless Movement) (**fig 3.27**), neither of which depict a specific site. In these paintings, Erizal attempts to capture atmosphere and energy. *Biru Menyambut* conveys the experience of early morning in Indonesia; the air is fresh, almost crisp. The sky, a bright blue, sets off the verdant landscape marked

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>392</sup> Mark Woodward, "Religion, Ethnicity, and Hate Speech in Indonesia's 2019 Presidential Election," *New Mandala* (December 17, 2019), <u>https://www.newmandala.org/religion-ethnicity-and-hate-speech/</u>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>393</sup> Aminudin TH Siregar, "Painting Darek," 31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>394</sup> Ibid., 30.

by palm trees and rice paddies that Erizal represents through a mix of blues and greens that dominate the canvas. The scorching equatorial sun has not yet risen high enough to make it unbearable to be outside. Its approach is inevitable, however, as indicated by the streaks of yellow and orange that pierce the composition. In *Energi Alam, Gerak Tak Berbatas*, Erizal takes his viewers in another direction. This painting is exemplary of Erizal's tendency to move beyond the canvas by letting the paint spill off the picture plane. This strategy is fitting for this canvas that, as indicated by its title, is Erizal's attempt to capture the power of nature that is without bounds and thus awe inspiring. Erizal's choice to title the exhibition that included these paintings that capture the experience of nature *Darek #1: Bentang Alam* firmly situates these abstract works in the Minangkabau.<sup>395</sup>

Wakidi did not practice such extreme levels of abstraction as Erizal does, but certain depictions of the Minangkabau heartland that he created between 1940 and 1956, including *Ngarai Sianok* (**fig 3.9**) and *Dataran Mahat* (Mahat Plain) (**fig 3.28**), stray from reality. Wakidi's son Idran divides Wakidi's career into two periods: a blue period that marks the first half of his career and represents his interest in morning light, and a red period that marks the second half of his career and indicates his interest in afternoon light.<sup>396</sup> *Mount Serillo by the Lamatang River at Lahat* (**fig 3.29**), which, created in 1926, depicts a site near Wakidi's place of birth in South Sumatra. Its yellow-and-green color palette diverges from *Ngarai Sianok* (**fig 3.9**), created in the 1940s, and *Dataran Mahat* (Mahat Plain), painted in 1954, both of which are cast in pink light.<sup>397</sup> Numerous reflections from his students point to his fascination with the reds and oranges that only appear at dusk.<sup>398</sup> Idran Wakidi's description that his father would sit for hours at a time, waiting for the exact moment when the light changed was so that he could capture the hues in paintings like *Ngarai Sianok* and *Dataran Mahat*. He attributed these colors to God rather than science.<sup>399</sup> This exemplifies further what for Wakidi was the sacred nature of the physical landscapes that constitute the Minangkabau heartland.

Wakidi's later paintings stray from reality in their intensity of reds and oranges. These hues overwhelm any other hue or shade in the landscape and thus stray from the actual experience of afternoon light. Moreover, the scale at which Wakidi depicts certain forms—like Tabiang Takuruang in *Ngarai Sianok* (**fig 3.9**), the lone cliff that stands at the center of Sianok Canyon—breaks from reality. A photograph of this cliff taken in the 1930s (**fig 3.30**) shows that while Tabiang Takuruang towers almost as high as the cliff walls, it is not nearly as large as Wakidi suggests it is. By enlarging Tabiang Takuruang, Wakidi emphasizes its significance to the inhabitants of this region. In Minangkabau the physical landscapes that are part of the Minangkabau heartland are imbued with cultural and symbolic significance. Alam is the intangible realms that structures the Minangkabau experience of these landscapes. It is often associated with the mind, the senses, or the power of God as creator of the natural world. Both Wakidi and Erizal sought to capture this in their depictions of the Minangkabau heartland by utilizing varying levels of abstraction.

#### Landscape's Legacies in and for a Contemporary Minangkabau Art World

Today, landscape painting is arguably an outdated genre in comparison to other forms that dominate discourse on global contemporary art. As art historian Gregory Doyle has written, in Indonesia

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>395</sup> Erizal AS, Darek #1: Bentang Alam, 48.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>396</sup> Idran Wakidi, "Wakidi dan Perkembangan Pendidikan Seni Lukis di Sumatra Barat," 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>397</sup> This is the earliest example of Wakidi's work that I have located.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>398</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

young artists increasingly rely on a mainstream artistic economy rooted in residencies and institutional commissions or art fairs that, in recent years, have become barometers of the national and regional art markets.<sup>400</sup> Looking to such institutions for legitimation, artists regularly produce artworks that are characterized by their grounding in research and by their large-scale multimedia formats that are often experimental and even ephemeral in nature. For many, this is the kind of art to be pursued to secure one's position within the parameters of Indonesia's art world and, eventually, the Southeast Asian and international art worlds. However, for artists associated with Minangkabau, aspiring artists continue to take up the landscape painting genre. In certain instances this has resulted in an artist's recognition beyond West Sumatra.

Throughout my fieldwork I encountered several Minangkabau-born artists who remain committed to the production of landscape painting. One such artist is Mamad Ridwan (b. 1979). Originally from a village in the Minangkabau heartland known as Sulit Air, Mamad lives in Padang. His stylistic approach resonates with the "colonial ways of seeing" in the work of Mooi Indie painters like Wakidi. For much of Mamad's career, landscapes were not central to his repertoire. Instead, he was interested in abstracted representations of the human form as indicated by his painting *Violin* (fig 3.31). Created around 2008, this painting depicts a small boy playing a violin atop a tree trunk on the edge of a cliff. When landscapes do appear in Mamad's earlier works, they are merely backdrops. However, in 2011 Mamad shifted to the production of what he describes as more "pure" landscapes after realizing that he no longer needed symbols like the boy, made of roots, to portray his own understanding of Alam Minangkabau.<sup>401</sup> Instead, he wanted to think through ways in which the work itself might be able to function as a symbol of Minangkabau. The result was largescale paintings, like Tanjung Alai Solok (fig 3.32), that are marked by an almost photo-realist precision. Like Erizal and Wakidi, Mamad spends a significant amount of time on location to capture these landscapes. He differs from his predecessors in his use of photography to capture the landscape before returning to his studio in Padang, where he creates his paintings using a small, thin paintbrush to ensure the kind of maximum precision evident in the foreground of Tanjung Alai, Solok, where individual leaves and blades of grass are visible.

Details that indicate a human presence are visible across Mamad's landscape paintings. In *Tanjung Alai, Solok* these includes the red and white cell towers and small streaks of white at the foot of the mountain on the painting's right that reference house-like structures. However, other forms and objects are omitted, in particular people and cars. Mamad explained to me that although the photographs he takes includes things like people and cars, he excludes them from his paintings because when captured on canvas, their fixity creates too great a contrast with the landscape that is "always alive."<sup>402</sup> This sentiment mirrors the pedagogical orientation of INS Kayutanam shaped by Muhammd Sjafei. It underscores an important facet of alam namely, that it is not static.<sup>403</sup> In his work Mamad is interested in reproducing a site's atmosphere, which is impacted by not only the way that light falls across the landscape but also temperature and other atmospheric phenomena. Although his color palette is dominated by cool colors, especially blues and greens, he sees his paintings as "hot." This is because hot air rises from the land that is itself hot, which results in condensation or a fine mist in the sky.<sup>404</sup> Mamad's identification of atmosphere as a key facet in his

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>400</sup> Gregory Doyle, "Beyond Indonesianness in Indonesian Contemporary Art," *New Mandala* (May 23, 2018), <u>https://www.newmandala.org/46166-2/</u>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>401</sup> Interview with Mamad Ridwan, December 14, 2016, Padang, West Sumatra.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>403</sup> See A.L. Samian, "Forces of the Cosmos in Alam Minangkabau: A Phenomenological Perspective," in *Analecta Husserliana: The Yearbook of Phenomenological Researched Volume*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (New York: Springer, 2015), 241-248.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

depiction of West Sumatra's landscapes parallels Erizal's studies like *Gestur Jelang Senja*. Together, each artist's work indicates that to capture alam it is necessary to account for both its tangible and intangible manifestations. Mamad's technical expertise that results in realistic portrayals of Alam Minangkabau is noteworthy because it contributes further to an understanding of what in Minangkabau constitutes "lukisan alam." It is also noteworthy because it has earned Mamad recognition outside of West Sumatra. This recognition can be understood in relation to the idea that in Minangkabau the landscape painting genre is "close to the people" or *paling merakyat*. Referenced in this dissertation's introduction this sentiment was put forth by Minangkabau-born artist Syaiful Adnan to explain the popularity of landscape paintings as decoration in Padang restaurants.

In 2017 the Sakato Art Community extended an invitation to artists in West Sumatra to participate in their annual exhibition, Bakaba. As discussed in chapter one, this event is held annually in the city of Yogyakarta. Mamad was one of ten artists from West Sumatra selected to participate in this edition of Bakaba. Notably, his work was not just included but became a centerpiece for this show. Mamad's depiction of West Sumatra, titled Landscape Mooi Indie #4, was placed in the entrance of the gallery (fig 3.33) across from a painting by Yogyakarta-based artist Taufik Ermas (b. 1984) titled Parallel Universe (fig 3.34). Comprised of approximately 155 small canvases, Parallel Universe is essentially a large-scale landscape painting that has been altered by the excision of two figures. This strategy is one that Ermas uses often to shift the viewer's focus. By concentrating on the empty space in the canvas, viewers can insert themselves into the composition.<sup>405</sup> Alongside his painting Ermas included the following quote, "Most of us have grown up by the seeing the world as a place of limitation. Being born to fly but being placed in a cage of perception as conditioned by the mind, related with history and memory about whom and what is remembered."406 In contrast to the way in which Mamad geographically situates Landscape Mooi Indie #4 in Indonesia through the classic depiction of a landscape and the work's title, Ermas' piece probes universal questions of belonging. The juxtaposition of Mamad and Ermas' work was a notable backdrop for the subtheme of this edition of Bakaba, "Indonesia." Framed by the Minangkabau aphorism, "mengejar ke hulu, memintas ke belakang," which can be translated as "chase upstream, while looking backward," the wall text in the gallery entrance asserted the desire to dissect conditions and issues in Indonesia by not only looking to the future but also examining history. For the members of Sakato, and Minangkabau artists more generally, the aphorism was a reminder of the impact that Minangkabau intellectuals, politicians, and artists have had on the conceptualization of an Indonesian identity since the mid-twentieth century. Here, Wakidi is part of this legacy as well as the landscape painting genre more generally.

The inclusion and prominence of Mamad's landscape painting in Sakato's annual exhibition is directly linked to the relevance of both the landscape painting genre and the specific site that Mamad depicted in his *Landscape Mooi Indie* #4 to members of the Sakato community. Like Wakidi and Erizal, Mamad's paintings depict specific sites located in the Minangkabau heartland. A work like Mamad's is thus, a reminder of where the members of Sakato come from. It not only evokes nostalgia but also is lauded for its technical precision. Taufik's rendition of a landscape painting is notable because it signals what for artists in the rantau, including Erizal is a tendency to engage with alternate styles of expression that diverge from the Mooi Indie style specifically and conventions of the landscape painting genre generally. As referenced in chapter one, members of the Jendela Art Group and the Sakato Art Community both expressed feelings of inferiority when they arrived in Yogyakarta in the 1990s and realized that the landscape painting genre was not practiced by artists in this city. This contrasted with their own experiences in West Sumatra where they were taught to create landscape paintings at West Sumatra's fine arts high school or encountered this genre in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>405</sup> Interview Taufik Ermas, September 2, 2017, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>406</sup> Bakaba #6 (Yogyakarta: The Sakato Art Community, 2017), 125.

homes of friends and family along with the few exhibitions that took place at West Sumatra's Taman Budaya. In response, these artists pushed themselves to move beyond the landscape painting genre and develop new styles of expression in their art. However, for artists in West Sumatra the same imperative does not exist. It is possible to hold onto history. This history has in turn, become a point of pride for artists in this region and is being actively promoted as a way to not only create cohesion amongst artists in West Sumatra but also set West Sumatra's art world apart from Indonesia's art world centers in Java. This is evidenced by a final anecdote situated in Pariangan.

In early-November 2016, I arrived in West Sumatra for what would be the first of a series of visits to this region over the course of my fieldwork. With plans to settle in the small highland town of Padang Panjang, home to West Sumatra's art institute ISI Padang Panjang, I was excited to learn that a three-day art festival was to be held that very weekend in a neighboring village, Pariangan. As my hosts explained, Pariangan had been declared one of "the most beautiful towns in the world" both because of the vistas that surround it and its historical significance as the original settlement of Minangkabau.<sup>407</sup> Today, Pariangan's historical past is indicated by an ancient tomb that is said to belong to one of the settlement's early rulers, as well as structures including the oldest rumah gadang in the region, a *surau* (communal living quarters for unmarried males) that is one of few surviving examples of such a structure in West Sumatra, and at the center of town and this photograph (fig 3.35), a mosque with a three-tiered roof said to date back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Since Pariangan was declared one of the world's most beautiful towns West Sumatra's Tourism Ministry has promoted this title. As a result, it has become a popular stop for visitors, especially those with some tie to the region who are keen to snap a photo in front of these sites that are imbued with historical significance because of the land that they stand on. It was also because of this that the festival's organizers felt Pariangan would be the perfect site to bring artists together to explore both their cultural and artistic roots through the production of landscape paintings.<sup>408</sup>

On the first day of the festival, along with friends from Padang, West Sumatra's provincial capital, I joined the approximately twenty artists who had set up camp on the hillside overlooking the village proper of Pariangan. The majority of those in attendance had come with their families from either Padang, Bukittinggi or, were lecturers at ISI Padang Panjang and lived nearby. In addition, there were a few attendees from as far as Riau, the province that borders West Sumatra to the east. Over the course of the festival its organizers intentionally provided little structure. Their hope was that during daylight hours the participating artists would spend their time capturing the landscape that stretched out before them from the festival campsite while at night they could enjoy traditional performances such as *tari piring* (plate dance) put on by the residents of Pariangan. For the mostly male contingent of artists this meant creating paintings that were either direct depictions of the landscape (**fig 3.36**) or as was the case for Kamal Guci (b. 1960), in line with an artist's standard artistic style. One of the more senior artists active in West Sumatra, Guci is known for his pointillist mode of representing scenes that reference Minangkabau culture. In the painting he created in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>407</sup> The title "one of the most beautiful towns in the world" was applied to Pariangan by the U.S. based travel website "budget travel" in a 2012 article listing the "16 Most Beautiful Towns in the World." Local media quickly picked up this accolade, followed by government officials who were keen to use it as a means to promote local tourism. <sup>408</sup> This festival was organized by the West Sumatra Fine Arts Association or *Yayasan Seni Rupa Sumatra Barat* (YSRSB).

This association was formed in November 2015 by visual artists living throughout the province of West Sumatra as a means to legitimize and make easier collaboration with and sponsorship by both provincial offices and national government ministries. The formation of this organization comes shortly after the establishment of "Kampung Sakato," a community comprised of artists who all previously lived in Yogyakarta as both students and artists. While the desire to develop West Sumatra's art scene appears to be a longstanding goal, these organizations mark the emergence of a new energy.

Pariangan (**fig 3.37**), for example, the structure that dominates the center of the canvas is a rumah gadang, easily recognized by its unique *gonjong* (hornlike) roof that sweeps towards the sky. Set against a verdant mountain backdrop, to the left of Guci's rumah gadang is a second structure with a two-tiered roof, an indication that this is a mosque like those found in villages throughout Minangkabau.<sup>409</sup>

As I stood alongside the artists' families and the many children from Pariangan who were curious about the artists' work, watching Guci and others create various depictions of the Minangkabau countryside, I was struck by the sincere interest of not only these artists but also the onlookers in the seemingly outdated genre of landscape painting. Whereas some artists like Guci have throughout their careers remained committed to depictions of the Minangkabau countryside, localized through the inclusion of objects like rumah gadang and mosques with multi-tiered roofs, others, such as Mamad Ridwan (b. 1979) have only recently returned to and committed themselves to representing this region's natural environment. Thanks to the conversations I had with the artists in attendance at this festival as well as the festival organizers about the event's focus on the landscape surrounding Pariangan, I left Pariangan with my first glimpse at what in the context of Indonesian artistic production and its history is the unique legacy of this region's environment and its depiction by visual artists that diverges significantly from what I have described in this chapter since the mid-twentieth century has been a standard narrative of landscape painting within the historiography of Indonesian fine art.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>409</sup> As is the case throughout Southeast Asia, in West Sumatra mosques, *masjid*, and *surau* found in villages throughout the region are built in a vernacular style that employs Hindu, Buddhist or Chinese architectural elements. Of particular note are pyramidal tiered roofs and the absence of a dome or minaret. On this style of architecture in Java see Hélène Njoto, "À Propos des Origines de la Mosquée Javanaise," *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 100 (2014): 11-37. And in West Sumatra see Bambang Setia Budi and Arif Sarwo Wibowo, "A Typological Study of Historical Mosques in West Sumatra, Indonesia," *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering* 17, no. 1 (2018): 1-8.

#### Conclusion

Approximately six months after I began fieldwork for this dissertation Jasdeep Sandhu, the owner of Gajah Gallery in Singapore presented me with the opportunity to curate an exhibition centered on my research. This offer was motivated by his own interest in and commitment to the work of Minangkabau-born contemporary artists. Presented with this opportunity, I suggested that we center this exhibition on the legacy of landscape painting in and amongst artist from West Sumatra. This suggestion was rooted in my own experience of the region's landscapes at events like the Pariangan art festival and even more so, what I observed in the first months of my research to be the consistent reverence for Wakidi amongst artists in and from West Sumatra. This experience proved critical for two reasons. First, it created a reason to have sustained conversations with a handful of artists on a range of topics, not least Minangkabau history and culture. Second, it helped me to secure a handful of interviews that otherwise would not have been possible, including with certain members of the Jendela Art Group. Preparation for this exhibition spanned six months, from September 2017 to January 2018 with the opening planned to coincide with Art Stage Singapore, an art fair that attracts collectors, gallerists, and art world observers from across the region.

In this dissertation I have foregrounded the impact that Southeast Asia's art boom in the mid-2000s had on the market validation and subsequently critical reception of Minangkabau-born artists specifically, the members of the Jendela Art Group. While this boom had a direct and observable impact on these and other artists associated with Minangkabau it also had broad implications for the region's art world and that of specific national contexts like Indonesia. My own experience of Southeast Asia's art world since 2011, has witnessed the proliferation of art fairs, art galleries, and the establishment of major institutions like Singapore's National Gallery. Further, it has also included global art world recognition of Indonesia evidenced by the inclusion of Indonesian artists and collectives at events including the Venice Biennale and documenta 15. And while all these developments cannot be directly attributed to the market, for, other factors not least globalization and the growth of a global contemporary art world in the post-Cold War era have also contributed to the current shape of Southeast Asia's art world generally and that of Indonesia specifically, with capital new possibilities emerge. For the artists under examination in this study this is evidenced by the growth of a physical ecosystem in Yogyakarta that has contributed to the shape of a contemporary Minangkabau art world. Because of this I both acknowledge the market and the imperative to think critically about the ways that it continues to shape the experiences of artists in regions like Southeast Asia as well as the reception of their work.

Thanks to the establishment of the Sakato Art Community and the Jendela Art Group in the mid-1990s there is now a greater coherence around Minangkabau identity in art. This is evidenced by factors including efforts to connect the work and activities of contemporary Minangkabau-born artists to their regional and ethnic origins as well as efforts to chart a history of art making specific to West Sumatra and Minangkabau. This study contributes to such efforts by engaging critically with adat (customary norms) and alam (nature, universe, and realms of perception). Adat, which informs the maintenance of a matriarchy in Minangkabau, has over time contributed to the mobility of Minangkabau-born artists. In this study, I have shown that merantau remains a cultural imperative in Minangkabau and continues to give shape to the careers of artists. This is evidenced by both the size of the Minangkabau diaspora in Yogyakarta and what throughout history has been the distinct character of work produced by Minangkabau-born artists in the rantau (outside of West Sumatra).

Overwhelmingly the artists examined in this dissertation are recognized for their production of abstract and semi-abstract works. Exceptions to this are Wakidi and Mamad Ridwan. Both

Wakidi and Mamad are instead, recognized for their production of landscape paintings that mimic colonial ways of seeing identic with the Mooi Indie style. This juxtaposition between artists who favor abstract styles and those that favor landscape is notable because during his lifetime Wakidi lived and worked in West Sumatra as does Mamad. For artists based in West Sumatra they are not pushed in the same way as those artists in the rantau to move beyond the landscape painting genre and find new modes of expression.

In Minangkabau landscape painting is looked to as a "traditional heritage" because of its association with Wakidi who is recognized as the first modern artist active in this region.<sup>410</sup> At West Sumatra's fine arts high school (SMSR) students are taught the conventions of landscape painting. For members of both the Sakato Art Community and the Jendela Art Group, who graduated from this institution in the 1990s, it was even the case that they studied under Wakidi's students who were teachers at SMSR. Today, in West Sumatra as evidenced by the Pariangan arts festival landscape painting is not only practiced but also being utilized as a reference point for distinguishing West Sumatra's art world from other art centers in Indonesia. As Minangkabau-based artist Alberto put it, the landscapes in West Sumatra are distinct and have the potential to make West Sumatra an art tourist destination.<sup>411</sup> What he meant is, West Sumatra should capitalize on the vistas in the Minangkabau heartland and find ways to attract non-Minangkabau artists to study and paint this region's landscapes. Notably, these vistas remain pristine and undeveloped because of adat. In the Minangkabau heartland, a significant amount of land remains in the hand of matrilineal clans. This makes it hard to break up or sell this land. Further, rules are in place whereby foreign companies are not allowed to establish business in the Minangkabau heartland.<sup>412</sup> This includes nationally owned companies. In short, in Minangkabau we can track an actual relationship between adat and land preservation that contributes to this region's beauty that makes it an attractive site for artists to paint en plein air. In this context, artists like Mamad who are based in West Sumatra do not shy away from landscape painting. Instead, they embrace it.

In contrast, for Minangkabau-born artists in the rantau the relationship to landscape painting is vexed due to factors including the position of Mooi Indie landscape paintings in nationalist historiography and the dominance of more "cutting edge" forms of art in Indonesia's contemporary art centers including Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Jakarta. Here, my reference to "cutting edge" is a nod to forms of expression like large-scale installations and research-based practices that are more commonly thought about in discourse that seeks to articulate a definition of what defines global contemporary art or our experience of it.<sup>413</sup> For Minangkabau-born artists in the rantau, rather than holding onto the landscape painting genre throughout history they have instead favored alternate styles of expression as a means to establish themselves outside of West Sumatra as members of local (Yogyakarta and Jakarta), national (Indonesia), regional (Southeast Asia), and global art worlds. I demonstrate this through my engagement with the work of Jakarta's Minangkabau modernists

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>410</sup> Aminudin TH Siregar, "Painting Darek," in *Erizal AS Darek #1: Bentang Alam* (Singapore: Gajah Gallery, 2022), 31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>411</sup> Conversation with Alberto, Pariangan, West Sumatra, Indonesia, November 2016.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>412</sup> For more on land ownership in Minangkabau and conflict that arises see Freek Colombijn, "Dynamics and Dynamite: Minangkabau Urban Landownership in the 1990s," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde,* 148, no. 3-4 (1992): 428-464.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>413</sup> I find Terry Smith's (2011) "three currents" useful for thinking about a trajectory of contemporary art's developments. These include art that developed out of modernist movements of the 50s and 60s and often had a direct relationship to the market (think Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst), art shaped by post and/or decolonial concerns, and art created by a younger generation that reflects on contemporary concerns (basically anything else). Further, I find Caroline A. Jones' (2013) thinking on the "aesthetics of experience" as useful for articulating how we interact with and are impacted by contemporary art. Here she places emphasis on how biennials or large-scale recurring art exhibitions have contributed to the production of large-scale multimedia works that through a coalescence of technology and the viewer's body performs a type of work that was not possible through earlier forms of artistic expression and display.

specifically, Nashar and OE as well as members of the Jendela Art Group and the Sakato Art Community. For Jakarta's Minangkabau modernists this resulted in their recognition as an aesthetic school distinct from Bandung and Yogyakarta. And in the case of Jendela's members this contributed to their market validation in the mid-2000s. Nevertheless, by moving away from landscape painting this does not mean that Minangkabau-born artists in the rantau reject or actively resist their ethnic and regional origins even if they do not seek to be defined by their Minangkabau identity or engage directly with Minangkabau in their art. Rather, as I have demonstrated, if we engage critically with the idea that the work of Minangkabau-born artists like the members of Jendela draws on the use of figurative speech in Minangkabau it is possible to trace a history of visual expression specific to Minangkabau that is rooted in the idea that "nature acts as our teacher" (*alam takambang jadi guru*).

The adage, "nature acts as our teacher," is looked to as the overarching principle of Minangkabau society because of its connection to adat. According to Minangkabau philosopher M. Nasroen, Minangkabau adat is understood as a system that is grounded in an understanding of and ability to interpret alam.<sup>414</sup> Traditionally, this informed how figurative speech was structured by drawing on naturally occurring phenomenon. It also contributed to the design of motifs like *pucuauk* rabuang discussed in this dissertation's introduction that decorate traditional textiles and architectural forms. Each of these forms, figurative speech, and motifs, are understood as expressions of adat because they transmit adat's teachings. However, in contrast to forms like the motif *pucuak rabuang* that draws directly on an example of figurative speech, in the work of Minangkabau-born modern and contemporary artists the intersection of linguistic and visual expression is uncommon. Instead, letting nature act as a teacher manifests in the "adat berkarya" or customary practice of making that characterizes the work of each of these artists and has overwhelmingly resulted in a tendency towards abstract or semi-abstract compositions. Here, paying heed to alam's various translations becomes imperative. This term, while commonly translated as "nature" is also understood as a reference to "realms of perception" and "universe." The fact that most artists in this study engage abstract and semi-abstract styles in their work indicates that alam's association with intangible facets of our human experience is critical to an understanding of what constitutes the natural world in Minangkabau. This is exemplified further by an understanding of how Wakidi, Mamad Ridwan, and Erizal AS all sought to capture the atmosphere of Alam Minangkabau in their landscape paintings. Because of this, I position this study as a contribution to a growing body of literature interested in how art expresses a relationship to the environment. Precisely because of alam's relationship to Minangkabau adat I contend that the work of artists associated with Minangkabau offers promising insights concerning how local cosmologies might contribute to our understanding of the Anthropocene.

The reality that most of the artists discussed in this study made a name for themselves outside of West Sumatra is also noteworthy because of what it demonstrates about the impact that the rantau has on Minangkabau adat specifically, in the contemporary era. For instance, through my discussion of the Sakato Art Community I described how this group has contributed to the development of "kaba." Where kaba refers to a form of oral literature in Minangkabau as well as the act of communicating by spreading information. Historically in Minangkabau kaba was performed by a single speaker for a Minangkabau audience. In contrast, Sakato's *kaba*, which is "performed" through their annual exhibition *Bakaba* is not only multilingual but also constituted by nearly one hundred speakers. By taking up kaba as the name of their annual exhibition, Sakato not only drew a direct connection to their Minangkabau origins but also breathed new life into this form of cultural expression that is associated with adat. Throughout my fieldwork along with the adage "alam

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>414</sup> M. Nasroen, Dasar Falsafah Adat Minangkabau (Jakarta: C.V. Penerbit 'Pasaman', 1957), 25-27.

*takambang jadi guru*" (nature acts as our teacher) I became familiar with several other proverbs because of how frequently they were recited. Two of these have a direct relationship to adat and are informative for our understanding of the significance of an exhibition like *Bakaba* as well as the work of Minangkabau-born modern and contemporary artists for both the continuity of adat and its transformation over time. These proverbs include: *"tak lakang dek paneb, tak lapuak dek ujan"* (not cracked by heat, not weathered by rain), and *"sakali air gadang, sakali tapiah barubah"* (when the flood comes, the bathing place moves). The first proverb refers to the idea that adat will always stand the test of time as evidenced by the maintenance of the matriarchy. While the second proverb refers to the idea that for adat to withstand the test of time it must also adapt in response to change. For Minangkabau-born artists in the rantau, living outside of the confines of Minangkabau social structure, adat is transformed by new contexts and experiences. This does not mean that adat loses its significance. Rather, as demonstrated in this study it becomes a tool through which Minangkabau-born visual artists have time and again set themselves apart from their non-Minangkabau peers. As a result, adat is transformed through the work of these artists and takes on new meaning through its association with visual art.

Finally, it is necessary to acknowledge that reference to and engagement with adat is not unique to Minangkabau-born artists like those discussed in this dissertation. In fact, the reality that artists from Bali part of Sanggar Dewata discussed in chapter one sought to maintain a Balinese spirit in their art by engaging with Balinese religious and spiritual beliefs and the adaptation of traditional techniques and styles reflects this groups attention to adat. However, in contrast to Sanggar Dewata that from its establishment associated itself with its ethnic and regional origins, until recently, Minangkabau-born artists in Java seemingly distanced themselves from their Minangkabau identity. In this study I attribute this to factors ranging from debates concerning the best direction for Indonesian art in the post-independence era that placed emphasis on national identity, at least until the 1970s, to stigmatization associated with Minangkabau as a result of the defeat of the PRRI rebellion in 1961. Building on this, a final proverb is noteworthy because of what it reveals about the ways that Minangkabau adat dictates what is perceived to be the appropriate behavior of Minangkabau migrants. This proverb states: "dima bumi dipijak, di sinan langik dijunjuang." It can be translated as "where the earth is trod upon, the sky is upheld" and conveys the idea that "when in Rome once must do as the Romans do." For Minangkabau migrants, this proverb is a reminder that to succeed beyond West Sumatra and outside of Minangkabau culture a migrant must adhere to the customs of the site where they have settled. Distancing oneself from Minangkabau might therefore be seen as a standard aspect of Minangkabau migration. Nevertheless, as evidenced by Nashar's connection to his Minangkabau compatriots in Jakarta, the size of the Sakato Art Community, the somewhat closed of character of both Sakato and the Jendela Art Group, and even, the ubiquity of Padang restaurants outside of West Sumatra, there is also a clear tendency to remain connected to home. Since the mid-2000s with the growth of Indonesia as well as Southeast Asia's art worlds, artists associated with Minangkabau have increasingly embraced their ethnic and regional origins. Either to set themselves apart in this increasingly saturated environment or in the case of West Sumatra's art world, as a means to assert their existence.

To conclude, in this study I have engaged with the work of artists active from the latecolonial era to the present. However, because of the sheer number of artists associated with Minangkabau who have been recognized for their individual contributions to the development of Indonesian modern and contemporary art as well as the tendency of certain artists to be grouped together, much remains to be explored in relation to individual trajectories and larger bodies of work. Here, I am referring specifically to the members of the Jendela Art Group and the artists that I have deemed Jakarta's Minangkabau modernists. Nevertheless, as I have demonstrated through my consideration of artists associated with each of these groupings as well as the Sakato Art Community, specifically Erizal AS, it is possible to track an adherence to the idea that "nature acts as our teacher." This is evidenced by the adat berkarya of these artists that to borrow Nashar's words is shaped by "vigilance" and "sharp intuition." The result, compositions that time and again have diverged from mainstream tendencies in Indonesian art.

# Figures

## INTRODUCTION



Figure I.1

Interior of Rumah Makan Duta Minang, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Author's photograph.



Photograph of calligraphic painting by Syaiful Adnan. Rumah Makan Duta Minang, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Author's photograph.



Photograph of landscape painting, artist unknown. Rumah Makan Duta Minang, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Author's photograph.



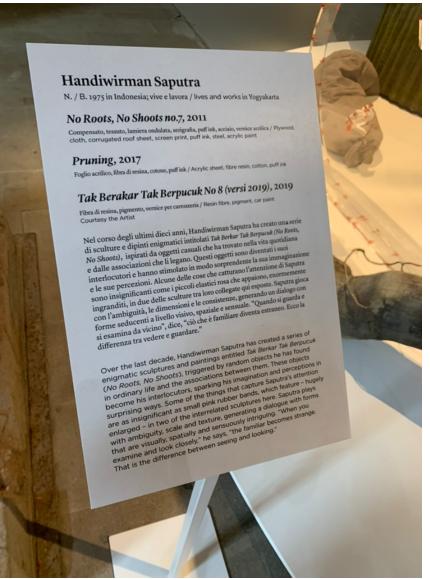
Works by Handiwirman Saputra on display in the Arsenale at the 58<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale. The cylindrical object at the back of the installation and the object hanging from the ceiling are both part of the *Tak Berakar, Tak Berpucuk series.* The object in the foreground is titled *Pemangkasan* (Pruning) and was created in 2017. Author's photograph, July 2019.



Photograph of the riverbed near Handiwirman Saputra's home in Yogyakarta that inspired his Tak Berakar, Tak Berpucuk (No Roots, No Shoots) series. Benda-Benda In-Situ catalogue, 2011.



Figure I.6 Handiwirman Saputra *Hari Ini, Kemaran, Esok* (Today, Tomorrow, Yesterday) 2018 Acrylic on linen 400 x 300 cm Author's photograph, on display at the Venice Biennale Arsenale, July 2019.



Placard next to Handiwirman Saputra's three-dimensional works displayed at the Arsenale, 58<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, 2019. Author's photograph.



Figure I.8

Photograph of Minangkabau *songket* in Pandai Sikek, West Sumatra. Author's photograph August 2019.



Figure I.9

Photograph of a *rumah gadang* (matrifocal longhouse) in Pandai Sikek, West Sumatra. Photograph Michael J. Lowe, 2005.



Figure I.10 Pucuak Rabuang (Young Bamboo Shoot) motif. From Fabled Clothes of Minangkabau.



Photograph of a young bamboo sprout referred to as *rabuang* in Minangkabau.



Figure I.12 Photograph of a mature bamboo plant referred to as *batuang* in Minangakbau.



Figure I.13 Kaluak Paku (fern leaf tendril) motif. Padang Panjang, West Sumatra. Author's photograph.



Figure I.14

Itiak Pulang Patang (ducks go home in the afternoon) motif pictured at top of banister. Padang Panjang, West Sumatra. Author's photograph.

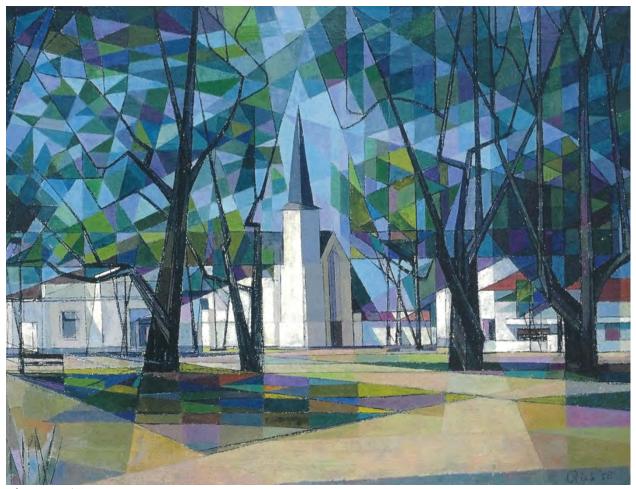


Figure I.15 Ries Mulder *Church of Bandung* 1958 Oil on canvas 70 x 90 cm From Helena Spanjaard, *Artists and their Inspiration: A Guide through Indonesian Art History (1930-2015).* 



Figure I.16 Sindudarsono Sudjojono *Di Depan Kelambu Terbuka* (In Front of the Open Mosquito Net) 1939 Oil on canvas 66 x 86 cm Image Indonesian Visual Art Archive. CHAPTER 1: Community and the Shape of a Contemporary Minangkabau Art World



## Figure 1.1

Kamasan style paintings on the ceiling of Kerta Ghosa Pavillion, Klungkung, southeast Bali. Author's photograph.



Figure 1.2 Denny Snod Susanto *Menunggu Kematian* (Waiting for Death) 1994 Oil on canvas 150 x 120 cm Sakato Art Community's Inaugural Exhibition Catalogue, 1997.

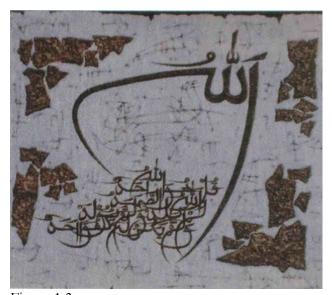


Figure 1.3 Syaiful Adnan *Yang Maha Esa* (The One and Only) 1994 Oil on canvas 120 x 120 cm Sakato Art Community's Inaugural Exhibition Catalogue, 1997.



### Figure 1.4

Interior of Sakato's secretariat that is part of Jumaldi Alfi's SaRanG comlex, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The exhibition in the photograph includes the work of Sakato members. It was on display during Jogja Art Weeks in 2017. Author's photograph.



Figure 1.5

Meeting with members of Sakato at Sakato's secretariat that is part of Jumaldi Alfi's SaRanG complex, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. January 2017.



### Figure 1.6

Three-dimensional works displayed on the ground floor of Purna Budaya at the inaugural exhibition of the Jendela Art Group. Yogyakarta, Indonesia, October 1997. Photograph private collection of Jumaldi Alfi.



Figure 1.7

Two-dimensional works displayed on the second floor of Purna Budaya at the inaugural exhibition of the Jendela Art Group. Yogyakarta, Indonesia, October 1997. Photograph private collection of Jumaldi Alfi.



Figure 1.8 Yusra Martunus *Mencari Ketenangan* (Looking for Calm) 1997 Wood 25 x 25 x 180 cm Photograph Indonesian Visual Art Archive.



Figure 1.9 Jumaldi Alfi *Love* 1997 Oil on canvas 100 x 100 cm Image MutualArt.



Figure 1.10 Yusra Martunus *99107* 1999 Prickly wire, iron, and polyurethane paint 32 x 34 x 40 cm Image Gajah Gallery.



## Figure 1.11

Jumaldi Alfi standing next to two of his paintings part of the the inaugural exhibition of the Jendela Art Group. Purna Budaya, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, October 1997. Photograph private collection of Jumaldi Alfi.

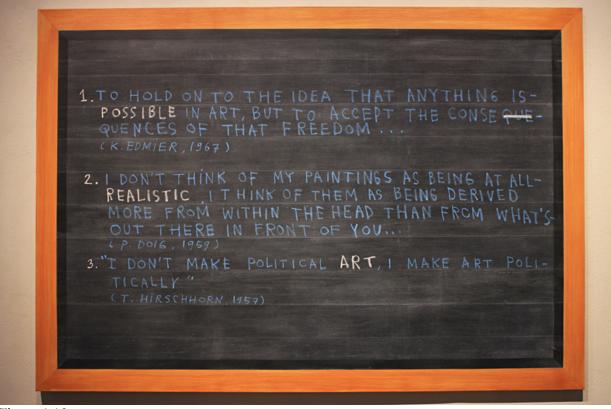


Figure 1.12 Jumaldi Alfi *Ever Ending Lesson "Possible Realistic Art"* 2012 Acrylic on linen 250 x 175 cm. Image IndoArtNow.





Exhibition view, *Slot in the Box,* Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, April 1997. Photograph Indonesian Visual Art Archive.



Figure 1.14 Harry Wahyu *Telinga* (Ear) 1996 – 1997 Acrylic paint, canvas, ceramic, fiberglass, mirror, paper, pencil, wood, worms. 230 x 50 x 60 cm Photograph Indonesian Visual Art Archive.



Figure 1.15 Semsar Siahaan *Tiket Sejarah Menuju Bencana* (History's Ticket to Disaster) 1997 Oil on canvas 100 x 100 cm Image Indonesian Visual Art Archive.



### Figure 1.16

Paintings by Handiwirman Saputra displayed at Nadi Gallery for *Biasa* (Ordinary), Jakarta, Indonesia, July – August, 2005. Photograph Nadi Gallery.



Figure 1.17

Paintings by Jumaldi Alfi displayed at Nadi Gallery for *Biasa* (Ordinary), Jakarta, Indonesia, July – August, 2005. Photograph Nadi Gallery.



Figure 1.18 Handiwirman Saputra *Seri Kertas Lipat 2* (Folded Paper Series 2) Acrylic on canvas 190 x 145 cm 2005 Image Nadi Gallery.



Figure 1.19 Handiwirman Saputra *Seri Bidang dan Bayangan Kapuk I* (Cotton Field and Shadow Series I) 2005 Acrylic on canvas 190 x 145 cm Image Nadi Gallery.

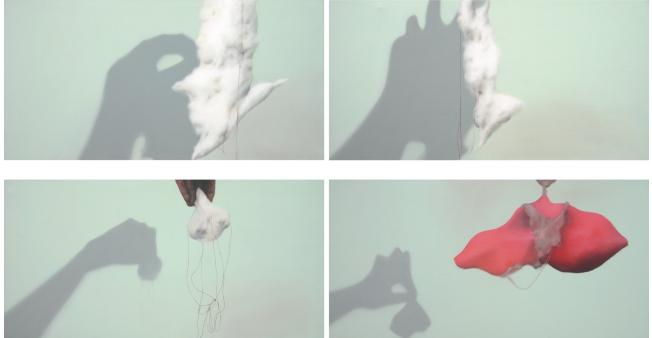


Figure 1.20 Handiwirman Saputra *Seri Benda dan Bayangan* (Object and Shadow Series) 2005 Acrylic on canvas 4 panels, each 100 x 200 cm Photograph Nadi Gallery.



Figure 1.21 Yunizar *Angin dan Tanah* (Wind and Earth) 2004 Acrylic on canvas 150 x 200 cm Image Nadi Gallery.

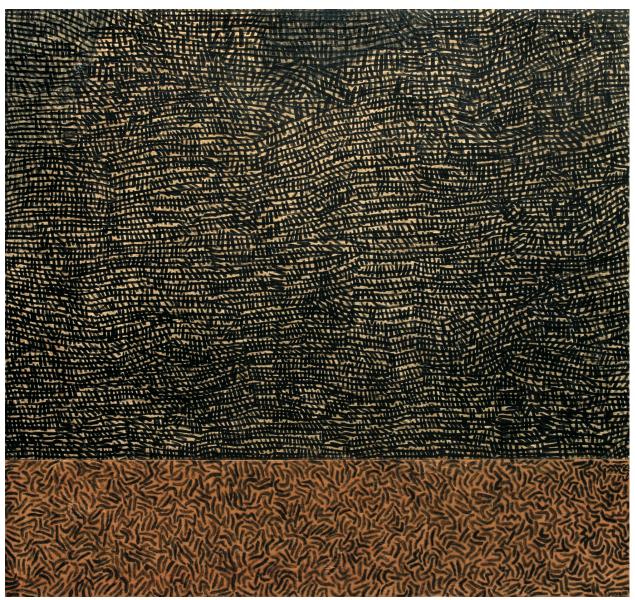


Figure 1.22 Yunizar *Setelah Hujan* (After the Rain) 2005 Acrylic on canvas 170 x 180 cm Image Nadi Gallery.





Members of the Jendela Art Group at the opening of *Biasa* (Ordinary) at Nadi Gallery, Jakarta, July 2005. From left to right: speaker unknown, Handiwirman Saputra, Yusra Martunus, Jumaldi Alfi, Yunizar, and Rudi Mantofani. All paintings in background by Rudi Mantofani.Photograph Nadi Gallery.

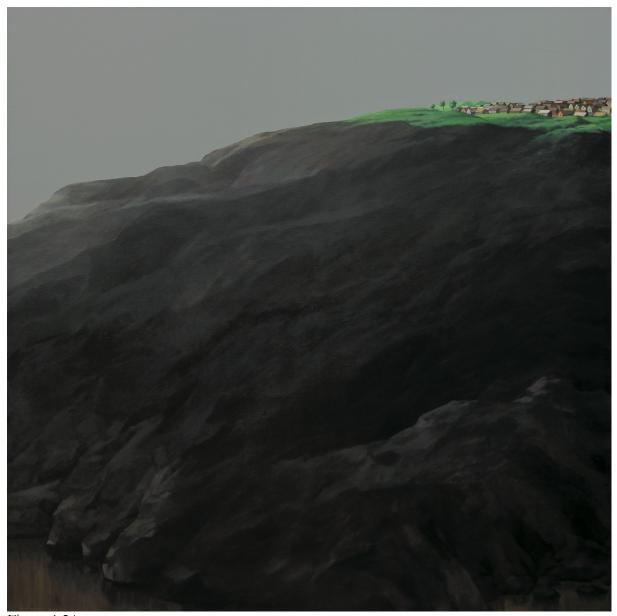


Figure 1.24 Rudi Mantofani *Ujung Pulau 1* (End of the Island 1) 2005 Acrylic on canvas 145 x 145 cm Image Nadi Gallery.



Figure 1.25 Exhibition view, *Bakaba #6,* Yogyakarta, Indonesia, May 2017. Author's photograph.



Figure 1.26 Exhibition view, *Bakaba #6*, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, May 2017. Author's photograph.

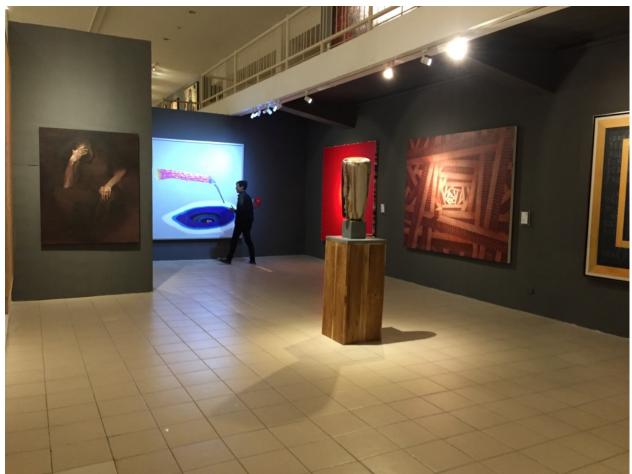


Figure 1.27 Exhibition view, *Bakaba #6*, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, May 2017. Author's photograph.

# CHAPTER 2: Jakarta's Minangkabau Modernists



# Figure 2.1

Photograph of Nashar sitting next to an unfinished canvas. Date unknown. Collection of Sulebar M. Soekarman and Nunung W.S.



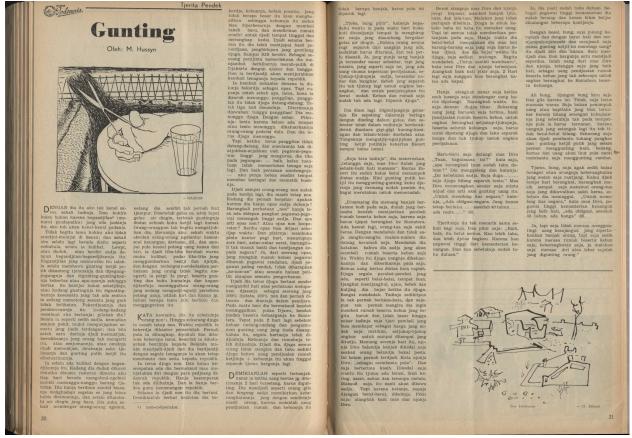
Figure 2.2 Nashar *Larut Malam* (Dead of Night) 1977 Oil on canvas 90 x 138 cm Image Art Agenda, S.E.A.



Figure 2.3 Amrus Natalysa *Kawan-Kawanku (My Comrades)* 1957 Oil on canvas 251 x 247 cm Image Indonesian Visual Art Archive.



Figure 2.4 Djoko Pekik *Go to Hell Crocodile* 2014 Oil on canvas 275 x 600 cm Image IndoArtNow.



## Figure 2.5

Foldout of *Mimbar Indonesia* no. 50 (23 November 1950). The drawing on the left was done by Nashar. The drawing on the right was done by Oesman Effendi. Collection University of California, Berkeley library.



Figure 2.6 Nashar *Di Pekarangan Rumah* (In the Yard) Oil on canvas 29 x 39 cm Image *Elegi Artistik Tentang Nashar dan Lukisan-Lukisannya*.



Figure 2.7 Affandi *Cockfight Gamblers* 1957 Oil on canvas 107 x 139 cm Image Indonesian Visual Art Archive.



#### Figure 2.8

Reproduction of the house that Nashar included as part of his signature on each of his paintings. Figure from Jeffrey A. Hadler, "*Night Letters:* The Ambiguous Archive of Soeharto's New Order (1968-1977)," unpublished version of paper delivered at the Association of Asian Studies Conference, Singapore, 2017.

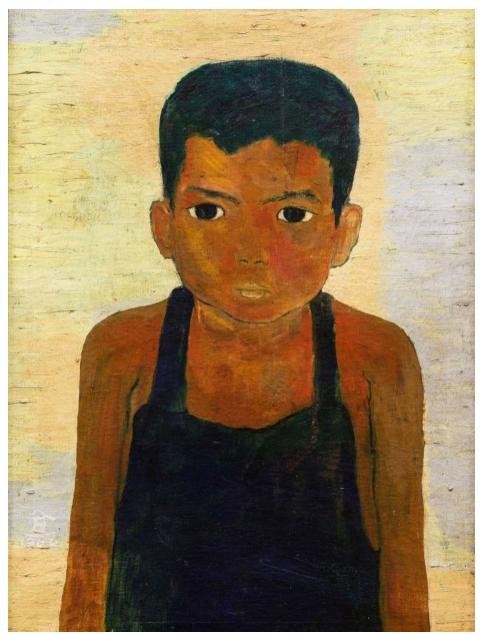


Figure 2.9 Nashar *Anak* (Child) 1964 Oil on canvas Dimensions unknown. Collection National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta.



Figure 2.10 Nashar *Ibu dan Tiga Anaknya* (Mother and her Three Children) 1964 Oil on canvas 64 x 122.5 cm Image *Elegi Artistik Tentang Nashar dan Lukisan-Lukisannya*.



Figure 2.11 Nashar *Kasih Ibu* (Mother's Love) 1964 Oil on canvas 70 x 72 cm Image D'Gallerie.

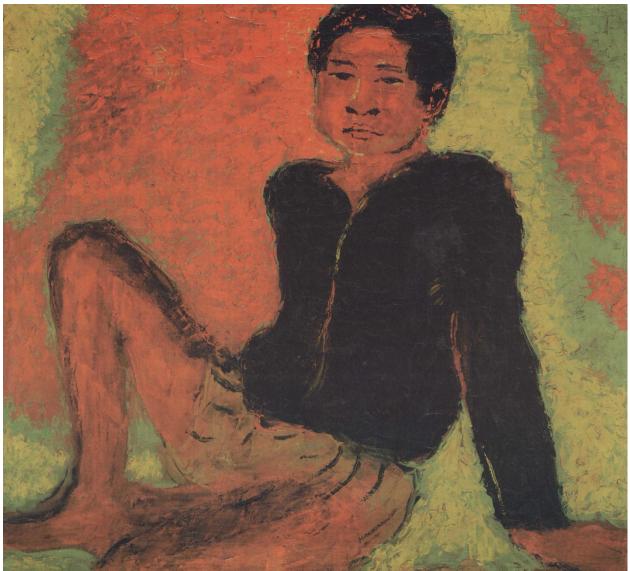


Figure 2.12 Nashar *Tetangga* (Neighbor) 1972 Oil on canvas 64 x 69 cm Image *Elegi Artistik Tentang Nashar dan Lukisan-Lukisannya*.



Figure 2.13 Nashar *Parangtritis* 1972 Oil on canvas 70 x 65 cm Image *Elegi Artistik Tentang Nashar dan Lukisan-Lukisannya*.

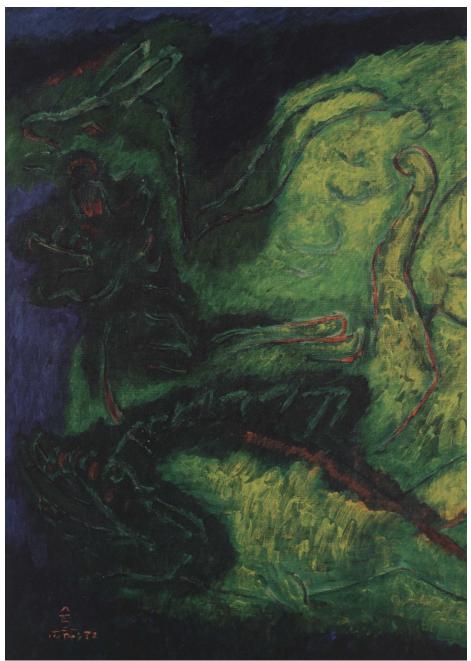


Figure 2.14 Nashar *Sebelum Ngaben* (Before Ngaben) 1972 Acrylic on canvas 94 x 65 cm Image *Elegi Artistik Tentang Nashar dan Lukisan-Lukisannya*.

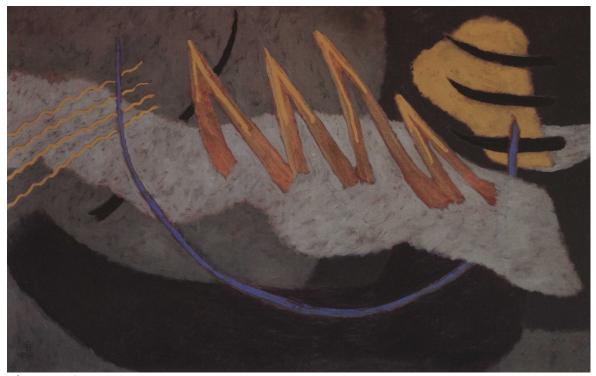


Figure 2.15 Nashar *Dunia Binatang* (Animal World) 1977 Oil on canvas 90 x 137 cm Image *Elegi Artistik Tentang Nashar dan Lukisan-Lukisannya*.

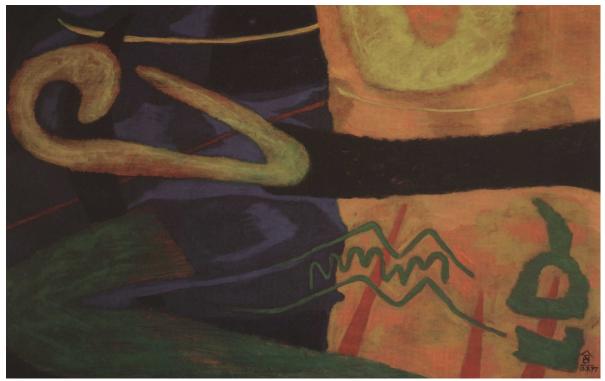


Figure 2.16 Nashar *Kampung Nelayan* (Fishing Village) 1977 Oil on canvas 88.5 x 137 cm Image *Elegi Artistik Tentang Nashar dan Lukisan-Lukisannya*.



Figure 2.17 Oesman Effendi *Kampung* (Village) 1967 Watercolor on paper Documentation *Para Sekutu Yang Tidak Bisa Berkata Tidak*, curators Grace Samboh et al., National Gallery of Indonesia, January 28 – March 13, 2022. Collection National Gallery of Indonesia.



Figure 2.18 Oesman Effendi *Matahari* (Sun) 1976 Acrylic on canvas 94 x 134 cm Collection Jakarta Arts Council.



Bundaran HI (Hotel Indonesia). "View from Hotel Kartika Plaza on the Roundabout Djalan Thamrin/Djalan Imam Bondjol in front of Hotel Indonesia." Photograph Boy Lawson, 1971. Tropenmuseum Collection, online.

# CHAPTER 3: Wakidi and Landscape's Legacies in Minangkabau



### Figure 3.1

View of *Minangkabau Heartland #1: Landscapes*, solo exhibition Erizal AS, September 2022, Gajah Gallery, Jakarta. Photograph Gajah Gallery.



Figure 3.2 Erizal AS Field, Barisan Mountains, Lake & Rainbow that Afternoon (Hamparan Sawah, Bukit Barisan, Danau & Pelangi Sore Itu) 2022 Oil on linen 79 x 151 in Image Gajah Gallery.



Figure 3.3

Watercolor depicting a rice field and mountain from Fredericus van Rossum du Chattel's album *Mooi Indië – Afbeeldingen in Kleuren van Twaalf Aquarellen* (Beautiful Indies: Illustrations of Twelve Watercolors). Collection of National Gallery Singapore Library & Archive. RC-RM51.



Figure 3.4

Watercolor depicting a forest and river scene from Fredericus van Rossum du Chattel's album *Mooi Indië – Afbeeldingen in Kleuren van Twaalf Aquarellen* (Beautiful Indies: Illustrations of Twelve Watercolors). Collection of National Gallery Singapore Library & Archive. RC-RM51.

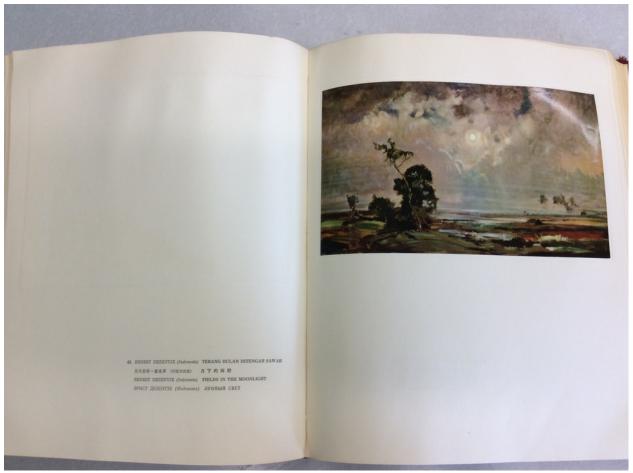
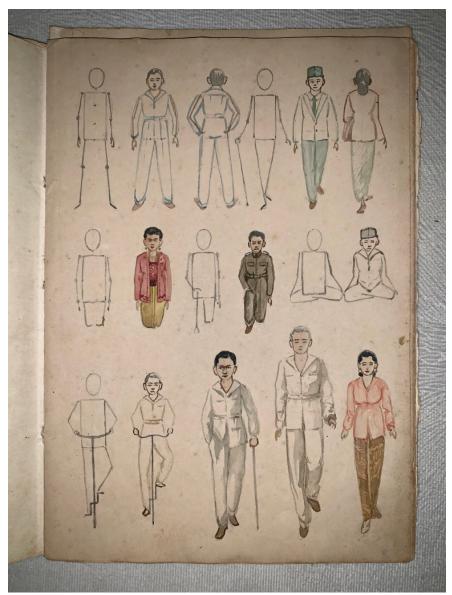
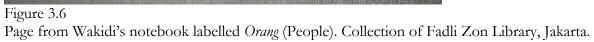


Figure 3.5 Ernest Dezentjé *Terang Bulan ditengah Sawah* (Fields in the Moonlight) Oil on triplex 71.5 x 121 cm Page from *Paintings from the Collection of Dr. Sukarno: President of the Republic of Indonesia*, volume II compiled by Dullah, 1956.





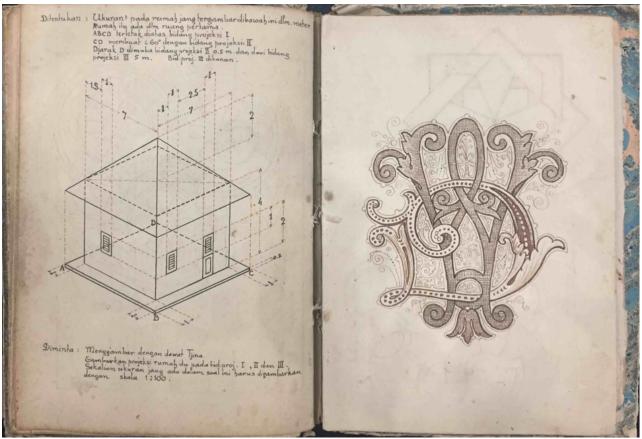


Figure 3.7 Page from Wakidi's notebook labelled *Ornament*. Collection of Gajah Gallery Singapore.





Karbouwengat (Sianok Canyon) Fort de Kock (Bukittinggi), Sumatra's West Coast, c. 1930. Collection Leiden University KITLV.



Figure 3.9 Wakidi *Ngarai Sianok* (Sianok Canyon) c. 1940 Oil on canvas 145 x 85 cm Image National Gallery of Singapore.

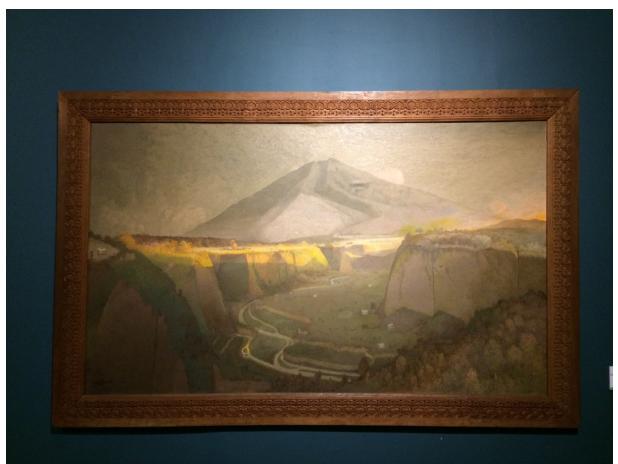


Figure 3.10 Wakidi *Lembah Ngarai* (Canyon Valley) 1977 Oil on canvas Collection National Gallery of Indonesia. Author's photograph.



Fig 3.11 Wakidi *Pekerja Wanita* (Woman Worker) Year unknown Oil on canvas 106 x 70 cm From *Collection of Adam Malik, Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia.* 



Figure 3.12 Wakidi (Untitled) Self-Portrait Year unknown Ink on paper Collection Fadli Zon Library.



Figure 3.13

Photograph of Wakidi, Bukittinggi, West Sumatra, September 16, 1945. Likely taken by Claire Holt during her visit to Wakidi's home. Collection New York Public Library, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, Claire Holt.

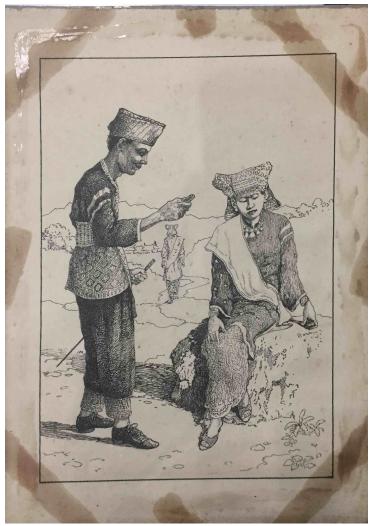


Figure 3.14 Wakidi *Cincin Tando* (Ring Sign) 1950s 17 x 24 cm Ink on paper Collection Fadli Zon Library.

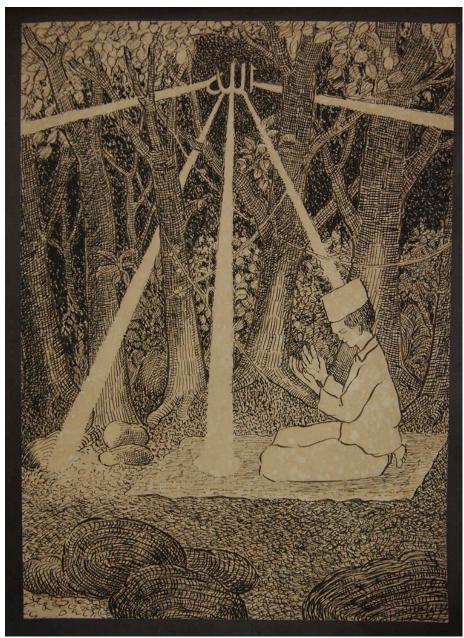


Figure 3.15 Drawing done with ink on paper attributed to Muhammad Sjafei. Collection Fadli Zon Library.



Figure 3.16 Vista above Pariangan, West Sumatra located in the Minangkabau homeland, October 2016. Author's photograph.



Figure 3.17 Erizal AS working en plein air, Padang Panjang, West Sumatra, 2022. Photograph Erizal AS.



## Figure 3.18

Erizal AS utilizing a wide paint brush to initiate the sky in his painting *Field, Barisan Mountains, Lake & Rainbow that Afternoon.* Padang Panjang, West Sumatra, 2022. Photograph Erizal AS.



Figure 3.19

Erizal AS utilizing a small palette knife to smooth out paint in his painting Field, Barisan Mountains, Lake & Rainbow that Afternoon. Padang Panjang, West Sumatra, 2022. Photograph Erizal AS.



Figure 3.20

Erizal AS squeezing paint directly from the tube for his painting *Field, Barisan Mountains, Lake & Rainbow that Afternoon.* Padang Panjang, West Sumatra, 2022. Photograph Erizal AS.



Figure 3.21

Erizal AS working on the painting *Field, Barisan Mountains, Lake & Rainbow that Afternoon.* In the background we can see the rainbow included in this composition. Padang Panjang, West Sumatra, 2022. Photograph Erizal AS.



Figure 3.22 Erizal AS Gestures of Dusk (Gestur Jelang Senja) 2022 Oil on linen 51 x 36 in Photograph Gajah Gallery.



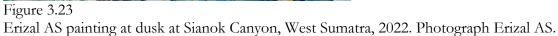




Figure 3.24 Erizal AS *Ambitious* 2019 Acrylic and oil on canvas 200 x 170 cm Image Gajah Gallery.

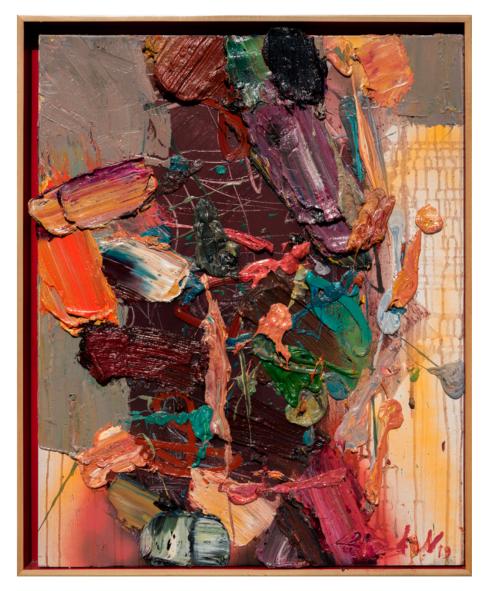


Figure 3.25 Erizal AS *Negosiasi Ruang Sempit* (Negotiating a Small Space) 2019 Oil on canvas 100 x 80 cm 106 x 7 x 86 cm (framed) Image Gajah Gallery.

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Figure 3.26 Erizal AS *Biru Menyambut Pagi* (Blue Greets the Morning) 2022 Oil on linen 202 x 142 cm Image Gajah Gallery.



Figure 3.27 Erizal AS *Energi Alam, Gerak Tak Berbatas* (Nature's Energy, Borderless Movement) 2022 Oil on linen and mindi wood 315 x 220 cm Image Gajah Gallery.



Figure 3.28 Wakidi *Dataran Mahat* (Mahat Plain) 1954 Oil on canvas 32 x 51 in The Claire Holt Papers, Division of Rare & Manuscript collections, Cornell University.



Figure 3.29 Wakidi *Mount Serillo by the Lematang River* 1926 Oil on board 25 x 32 cm Image Gajah Gallery.



# Figure 3.30

Michiel's Peak (Tabiang Takuruang) in Karbouwengat (Sianok Canyon) near Fort de Kock (Bukittinggi), West Sumatra, c. 1930. Collection Leiden University KITLV.



Figure 3.31 Mamad Ridwan *Violin* Year and dimensions unknown. Acrylic on canvas Image Mamad Ridwan.



Figure 3.32 Mamad Ridwan *Tanjung Alai, Solok (06.06.2017, 07.00 Wib)* 2017 Acrylic on canvas 290 x 119 cm Image Gajah Gallery.

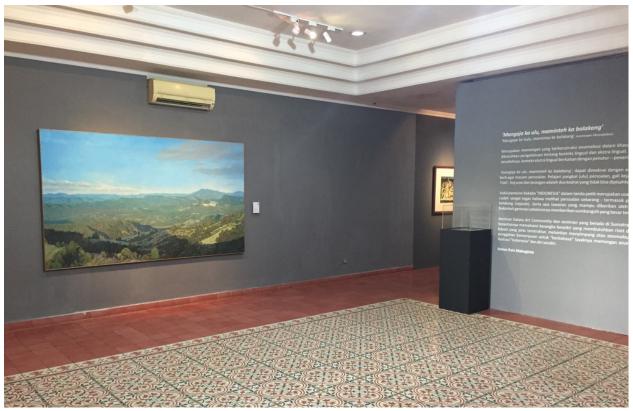


Figure 3.33 Mamad Ridwan *Landscape Mooi Indie #4* 2017 Acrylic on canvas 150 x 250 cm Author's photograph, on display at *Bakaba #6*, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, May 2017.



Figure 3.34 Taufik Ermas *Parallel Universe* 2017 Mixed media on canvas (155 pcs) 205 x 1030 cm Author's photograph, on display at *Bakaba #6*, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, May 2017.



Figure 3.35

View of Pariangan, West Sumatra. This village referred to as Ngarai Tuo Pariangan is believed to be the original settlement of Minangkabau. At the center of the photograph is the village's mosque, denoted by its three-tiered roof. Author's photograph.



Figure 3.36

Artists Ferdian Ondira Asa or Rocky (left) and Mamad Ridwan (center) at the Pariangan art festival, November 2016. Author's photograph.



Figure 3.37 Kamal Guci at the Pariangan art festival, November 2016. Author's photograph.





Map I.1 West Sumatra, Indonesia Source Wikipedia.



# Map I.2

Indonesia, with emphasis on Java and key sites across this island including Jakarta (black star), Bandung (red star), and Yogyakarta (blue star). These cities are home to the nation's oldest and most noted art schools.



## Map 3.1

The areas highlighted on this map constitute the Minangkabau Heartland that is referred to variously as *Luhak Nan Tigo, darek,* and *ranah.* This area is considered the birthplace or original settlements of Minangakbau. The areas highlighted include Agam (blue), Lima Puluh Kota (green), and Tanah Datar (red).

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