

Markers Of Post-conceptual Painting In Bandung Contemporary Arts (A Case Study On Errata-optika Exhibition)

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Seni lukis dalam perkembangannya telah mengalami berbagai kritikan baik itu terhadap medium maupun substansi konseptualnya. Saat ini seni lukis banyak dianggap sebagai strategi representasi belaka. Penelitian ini mencoba untuk melihat dan menyusuri perubahan paradigma seni lukis pada era kontemporer, perluasan konseptual khususnya penggunaan perangkat optik dalam penciptaannya. Kasus studi dalam penelitian ini adalah sebuah pameran di tahun 2007 berjudul Errata-Optika yang diyakini sebagai tonggak penting perubahan paradigma dalam seni lukis kontemporer. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan kritik dan studi literatur mengenai sejarah seni lukis hingga era kontemporer. Observasi dilakukan sebagai metode pengumpulan data dari pameran Errata-Optika. Pameran tersebut menampilkan tujuh seniman dan dua puluh dua karya lukisan yang menggunakan perangkat optik dalam metode penciptaannya. (Kata-kata Kunci: Seni Lukis Pos-Konseptual, Seni Rupa Kontemporer, Bandung, Pameran)

Painting in its development has undergone various criticisms both of the medium and its conceptual substance. Currently painting is widely regarded as mere representation strategy. This study tries to see and tracing the paradigm shift in the era of contemporary painting, conceptual expansion, particularly the use of optical devices in its creation. Case study in this research is an exhibition in 2007 entitled Errata-Optika that was believed to be an important milestone paradigm shift in contemporary painting. This study used qualitative methods to approach the criticism and the study of literature on the history of painting to contemporary era. Observation was carried out as a method of collecting data from the exhibition Errata-Optika. The exhibition featured seven artists and twenty-two paintings that used optical devices in its creation method.

Keywords: Post-conceptual Painting, Contemporary Art, Bandung, Exhibition

I. INTRODUCTION

The practice of painting since almost two decades backwards has undergone very significant changes. If traced back it indeed must be due to the radical changes that occur globally by the end of the twentieth century. Criticism and the onslaught of various art media until the end of 1960 have made the art of painting no longer the most important art form. Arts in its very of nature though are still condemned to undergo changes and got assessment continuously, sue even are sued so that what is called the art also including what is art change over time.

“Since the meaning of art is tied to the condition of its production and reception, the form and substance of artwork can , and must, change over time: artworks are historical through and through” (Gaiger, 2004:89)

Painting grows continuously, coming up with an answer to the criticism, in the forms of practices and concepts that always legitimize its position in art. The issue now surfaced in contemporary art is the art of painting that is seen only as a mere presentation media, just the same as other media. Selection of the painting to become medium is nothing more than a strategy of expression to the artist. What then

historically contained in painting is biased away. Historically, painting has suffered a lot of criticism, if we examine it back on when Marcel Duchamp announced his rejection of the painting as well as the emergence of *avant garde* fine arts with all 'new' art forms they carry, it can be said that it was a crisis for painting. Not only that, if you look further, painting also has a bleak history when the 'onslaught' of photography struck in the early 20th century. The emergence of photography, at that time, replaced painting as a representation. Photos present 'live' images with faster processing and high accuracy. Photography at that time was also considered to perfect painting deficiencies in delivering reality into a two-dimensional format.

That situation is a cultural change that delivers painting into a new form, i.e modern painting. Modern painting shows that the painting actually can 'do' further than photography. It no longer becomes a mirror of reality like photos, but tries to look into itself and presents itself as an art, showing the physical qualities of painting, color, shapes, texture, and lines, or what is known as the efforts of purification (purity).

If we look back, currently the real painting cannot escape the burden of history that go with it. Abstract painting in the modern era is a manifestation of the desire to bring painting to a common form and as innocent as the shape itself. Clement Greenberg wrote in a note to mention that,

"One tends to see what is in an old Mater before seeing it as a picture, "whereas" one sees a Modernist painting as a picture first." (Schwabsky, 2002: 6)

Which later became what is called by Greenberg as *"The Modernist Way of Seeing"*, a universal perspective in viewing the artwork.

But Greenberg also mentions in one of his view that perspective in art is not a single, there is no a single way of looking to describe all possible visual effects in art. He align these findings with a mathematical theorem i.e *Godel's theorem* concerning *incompleteness*, where no one axiom to complete the entire math problem. *Contemporary painting* is then not a single viewpoint, but a plural form, which must be addressed with an outlook that is different as well. At this time a variety of possibilities for new aesthetic axiom will always emerge. The aesthetic

axiom today is not just a visual matter but also the issue of the medium of painting that experience a redefinition into a new possibility. It was also an issue of perspective, in which a work will cause an effect of visual perception that is also important as a discussion.

Contemporary painting as described in the book of Vitamin P, gets meaning precisely through distinctness, how today's artists have their respective answers to various problems of painting, and how well a painting is interpreted not only as painting but as a representation of the idea on painting.

"Contemporary painting retains from its Modernist and Conceptualist background the belief that every artist's work should stake out a position-that a painting is not only a painting but also the representation of an idea of painting." (Schwabsky, 2002: 8)

The distinctness is also about the medium of painting. The introduction of mix media of painting is a contribution of a genius artist Pablo Picasso in the early 20th century. Picasso in May 1912 made a first collage work by affixing *oilcloth* (a kind of oil-coated fabric on one side to make it waterproof) with a motif in part from a wicker chair on the surface of the oval canvas, circled by a rope around. Then in August of the same year Picasso visited the artist and close friend, Georges Braque, who also began to put the pieces of wall paper on his drawing and painting. When he returned to France in September, Picasso later also put newspaper, wall paper, and the like into the painting. (Staniszewski, 1995: pp. 210-211)

Collage marks a breakthrough in the tradition of Western painting. Organic integrity of oil paint on canvas is marred by a mass material, it also destroys the 'purity' of paintings that are considered pure before. Picasso and Braque seemed to have disconnect 'traditional' relationship between the artist and his work. Selection of the mass material done by Picasso is not without reason, it is then linked with the problem of creation or creation made by an artist actually also depends on things outside themselves, objects that they did not create directly. Also he mentioned the current code and language of the culture.

In the book *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, at the *Metier and Medium vs. Practice* are elaborated that the lawsuit against modernity and formalism more peaked in mid-1960 First in America and then spread to the UK regions, and eventually, the entire Western world.

In the 1970s Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried were the last critics who still adhered to the conception of "*significant form*", and that there is no art form among those using the medium of mixture; if there is one, it is not art. On the other hand the conceptual generation artists said that art is a concept, it is an extreme form of treatment and a lawsuit against the medium. Painting responded by expanding the way of seeing to the medium, and mix media on painting later evolved to the present.

Errata-Optika is a joint exhibition of seven artists featuring twenty-two paintings. The exhibition became attractive since Agung Hujatnika as curator look at the issue of propensity what he calls the 'new realism' that developed in Bandung in recent years. The exhibition was organized by Selasar Sunaryo on 24 August to 14 September 2007, featuring artists including Beatrix Hendriani Kaswara, Dadan Setiawan, Dikdik Sayahdikumullah, Harry Light, Faith Sapari, J. Ariadhitya Pamuhendra, Willy Hima. All seven artists are united not by a common representation of a typical symptom, i.e the use of an optical device in the collection of visual data and then elaborated into a painting. Hujatnika was very keen to see the same phenomenon in the 15th century. Hujatnika study originated from a book by David Hockney in which he found that by the 15th century painter who had been getting the notion of genius for being able to create works of art that have the same quality and high accuracy with the object. Hockney discovered that the artist was then used optical aids in the working method almost the same with what is done contemporary painting artists when using the projector to improve accuracy in his work.

The exhibition has the quality that the author refers to as a symptom of similarity to the symptoms of post-conceptual painting expressed by Jason Greiger in a paper entitled *Post-Conceptual Painting: Gerhard Richter's Extended Leave-Taking*. Works by Gerhard Richter presented in the paper are understood as conceptual expansion of painting

after the onslaught of criticism from the development in new media and arts 'today'.

II. METHODOLOGY

The method used is a qualitative method. It is a descriptive qualitative method by analyzing various literature data into a theory and data from interviews and observations to support the research.

The type of data in this study were obtained through two ways namely, literature study and data observation on the works in the *Errata-Optika* exhibition. Literature data include contemporary art, aesthetics, and the process of creation. The study of literature was done through books and journals. Observations were made to collect data on the works of the *Errata-Optika* exhibition through the internet and exhibition catalogs.

III. DATA EXPOSURE

Reading the introduction written by the Agung Hujatnika as the curator of Errata-Optika exhibition gives the impression that he wanted to make this as a new form of movement that was started by a couple of artists with similar tendencies of creation practices. The seven artists in this exhibition have been selected by Hujatnika because of the new way in realism practice and see it as language, generated by the optical technology.

Beatrix Hendriani Kaswara offers digital images he has processed using computer software so that it looks just like outside colored lines. It instantly reminds us of the neon sign luminescence which is identical with shallow urban life. It is interesting because of the message he rams with the image of the army. According to Hujatnika, Beatrix choses this method to disguise, remove object clarity at the same time dragging out optical illusion.

Dadan Setiawan, with his distinctive work often displays images in low resolution magnified in such a way that the pieces are clearly visible. Hujatnika wrote in his curatorial that Dadan himself choses the low-resolution camera phones as a mass optical technology representing the instant culture of society.

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Picture 1. Indonesian Army #1
Size: 125x175 cm
Medium: Acrylic paint on canvas
Year: 2007
(Source: Katalog Errata-Optika)



Picture 4. Between Physicality (Blue)
Size: 70x90 cm
Medium: Oil paint on canvas. Year: 2007
(Source: Katalog Errata-Optika)



Picture 2. Park view No.2
Size: 129x174 cm
Medium: Acrylic paint on canvas
Year: 2007
(Source: Katalog Errata-Optika)



Picture 5. Mercury Night (Bridge Series #1)
Size: 120x150 cm
Medium: acrylic paint and spray paint on canvas. Year: 2007
(Source: Katalog Errata-Optika)

Hujatnika wrote that Dikdik Sayahdikumullah's work in this exhibition is the most appropriate example to illustrate the most intense tension between the images that are optically distorted and those represented by reality.

For the work of Harry Light, Hujatnika emphasized on dual tone coloring having the effect in the loss of realistic character of the represented sea surface. Another impact is the loss of an illusion of depth and optical clarity

According to Hujatnika, the work of Iman Sapari above, illustrates the glow of city lights as an area of almost solid circle when it shall look optically transparent



Picture 6. You Didn't Start the Fire
Size: 180x145 cm
Medium: Charcoal on canvas
Year: 2007
(Source: Katalog Errata-Optika)

Hujatnika viewed Hendra doing some sort of blurring what is called by 'aesthetics of photocopiers' as a strategy of the most popular mass reproduction in Indonesia, which is applied to produce optical images that are failed at glance, but impressive.



Picture 7. Motion and Stillness
Size: 120x180 cm
Medium: Acrylic paint and charcoal on canvas
Year: 2007
(Source: Katalog Errata-Optika)

The work entitled Motion and Stillness above shows three panel containing the blurred image cars, looks as if moving fast. At the bottom of the canvas there is footage of a running text mentioned by Hujatnika as frozen.

IV. CONCLUSION

Since the post-second world war, art and art history has undergone radical change. It was an epistemological change in perspective and understanding arts. In the late 1950s in America, pop art, and conceptual art shifts the dominance of high-style Greenbergian modern art. As quoted in the book of *Theory and Documentation on Contemporary Art A Resource Book of Artist Writings*, Greenberg writes:

"The essence of Modernism lies... in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself... What had to be exhibited and made explicit was that which was unique and irreducible not only in art in general but also in peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself." (Greenberg in Stiles, 1996:2)

The essence of universal and exclusive modernism, as well as the significance of the medium, especially in painting becomes the main target of criticism against him. The post-modernism then doubts all the modern art establishment. The post-modernism redefines the understanding of art and how to look at art.

"The modernist paradigm is generally understood to reflect rational liberal humanism and belief in progress establish during the Enlightenment... In contrast, a postmodernist perspective views these same constructs as contingent, sufficient, and lacking transcendence, and progress is understood to a theological concept that lends narrative coherency to change through time." (Stiles, 1996:2)

Objectivity in modernism is then doubted, identity and subjectivity are no longer understood as a whole but polymorphic fragments, and without a clear center. Everything well established in the era of modernism such as signs and symbols, are deconstructed by postmodernism to become ambiguous, arbitrary, and capricious. Postmodernism sees things, especially culture in a connectedness, heterogeneity, multiculturalism perspective primarily to

the question of gender, sexuality, class, and race. The peak of modernist belief about *the truth* is replaced by a radical relativism to the concept of truth is negotiable.

In the art world, the most significant thing of all this debate is the expansion of the media in terms of art or the conceptual change of category in art. Conventional media such as painting and sculpture shift towards all forms of unthinkable media hybrid. Automatically the categorization is not important anymore, the media becomes a tool or a way of expressing not becomes a significant form.

Not only the media in art experienced expansion of change, but the way artists view art and the social field of art come to follow. Artists began seeing a theoretical strategy as important as the artwork. Working, including the selection of techniques and mediums, becomes a mere representation strategy. Post-conceptual painting is present on the basis of artist awareness that painting is a medium and the concept is not just a mere representation strategy but rather a complete concept and language which cannot be replaced by other art forms. Post-conceptual painting liberates restrictions of painting conventionally, evaluates history without leaving it too far.

The seven artists in the Errata-Optika exhibition have presented this awareness. The use of optical devices as a method of work consciously puts technology not as a counter over conventional painting medium, but as an expansion of the representation strategy on the concept that they want to put forward. Optical technology that in the modern era became the biggest criticism for painting, but in this exhibition it is celebrated starting from the admiration for images produced, until the markers of a cultural change that is massive and instant. All are summed up in the works displayed in the exhibition. So it is not impossible to make the Errata-Optika exhibition as a marker of the emergence of post-conceptual painting in Bandung.

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