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# The Christian Art Scene in Yogyakarta

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Protestantse Theologische **Universiteit**



# INTRODUCTION

Yogyakarta, Java's youth-full university city and one of the two remaining sultanates in Indonesia, is second only to the scenic island of Bali as the site of a flourishing Christian art scene.<sup>1</sup> With a population that is ca. 95 % Hindu, Bali remains a haven for Hinduism, while Yogyakarta today, like the rest of the country, is dominated by Islam. The Hindu-Buddhist past remains present, however, in the impressive, partly restored temple ruins of Prambanan and Borobudur not far from the city. Similar to Balinese Hinduism that not only absorbed Buddhism but also is a syncretistic amalgamation of traditional religion and culture (*Agama Hindu Bali*), Javanese Islam is at the same time drenched in traditional mysticism and the Hindu-Buddhist heritage. The iconography of the pillars in the entrance hall of the sultan's palace (*kraton*) already reflect this in their symbolism. The pillars are green – the color of Islam – with their lower parts decorated with a red and white lotus flower (Buddhism) and stylized elephant feet (Hinduism). The sultan has so far opposed fundamentalist tendencies within Islam and has also shown a tolerant attitude to Christianity. Traditionally the *kraton* provides a space for art and crafts and the sultan officiates as patron and sponsor.

As early as 1949/50, soon after the Republic of Indonesia was founded (1945), the govern-

ment established an Art Academy in Yogyakarta (ASRI – Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia) that over the years would become the leading institution in the country.<sup>2</sup> In the beginning the buildings were spread over several places. Due to good teaching staff and the ability to improvise, a project system (*Sistem proyek global*) could be implemented. In spite of the lack of experience and limited curriculum, the program appealed to the initiative of teachers and students alike. Painting, sculpture, carpentry and a number of smaller subjects collected under the abbreviation Redig (*Reklame, Dekorasi, Ilustrasi Grafik*): advertising, decoration and graphic design were taught. When it became obvious that the graduates could not make a living as freelance artists, the emphasis was shifted to art education. In 1968 ASRI received college status that allowed it to offer undergraduate programs.<sup>3</sup> After a merger with two other art institutions for music (AMI – Akademi Musik Indonesia) and dance (ASTI – Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia), in 1984 ASRI became Indonesia Art Institute (ISI – Institute Seni Indonesia). It moved from Gampingan to its present location in Bantul, both located in the outskirts of Yogyakarta, in 1995. ISI maintains a vibrant, interactive relationship with the local art scene. Most of the artists portrayed in what follows have some kind of connection with it.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Volker Küster, Karel Steenbrink and Rai Sudhiarsa, *Christian Art in Indonesia*, in: Jan Sihar Aritonang and Karel Steenbrink (eds), *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, Leiden and Boston 2008, 925-949; *Many Faces of Christian Art in Indonesia (Beberapa Wajah Seni Rupa Kristiani Indonesia)*, ed. by Communion of Churches in Indonesia (*Persekutuan Gereja-Gereja di Indonesia*), Jakarta 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of the Ministry of Education and Culture No. 32/Kebud, December 14, 1949.

<sup>3</sup> STSRI (*Sekolah Tinggi Seni Rupa Indonesia*), the name ASRI was also kept, because this abbreviation at the same time means "nice" or "comfortable place" in Indonesian.

# 1. BAGONG KUSSUDIARDJA

The most charismatic representative of the Christian art scene in Yogya was the dancer and painter Bagong Kussudiardja (1929-2004). Born into a family of Javanese Muslims (*abangan*) belonging to the local gentry (*bangsawan*) of the Sultan's palace, he spent his whole life in his birthplace Yogyakarta. His wife being a Christian, Bagong converted together with his children in 1968/69. Other families in the kraton followed his example. In his art expressions Bagong, who initially was supposed to become sultan, did not hesitate to make ironic allusions to the kraton. He choreographed for instance a dance that was based on the kraton dance, but mocked it by making certain changes. In 1988 he entered the campus of Duta Wacana Christian University with an Easter procession that started in one of the neighborhoods. This was a kind of symbolic inversion of the sultan's procession that leaves the kraton to enter the city.

After his baptism by an American Baptist missionary, Bagong began to paint Christian themes. As early as 1948 he had begun to study painting with leading artists like Affandi (1907-1990), Hendra Gunawan (1918-1983), Kusnadi (1942-1997) and Sudiardjo of the thriving local art scene. He soon started to teach at the Art Academy (ASRI) himself. Before his conversion Bagong was experimenting with traditional styles and themes. Sometimes he got inspiration from his younger brother who was a man of letters (*sastrawan*). Bagong was not only painter and Batik artist<sup>4</sup> but also took lessons in traditional dance and became a well-known choreographer. Already in 1958 he had established a Dance Training Center (PTL). The artist himself once stated: "Art is a part of my life. I feel that one needs art just as one needs food, clothing and shelter."<sup>5</sup> Many group and solo exhibitions national and international as

well as a number of art prizes testify to his high reputation as an artist. Works with Christian motifs constitute only a small part of his rich oeuvre. In his late sixties Bagong was remarried to a Muslim woman. He therefore had to formally reconvert to Islam at the Office for Religious Affairs (KUA). Even though it is said that he remained Christian in private, in his last years Bagong became estranged from Christianity. It was only on his death bed in Yogja's Bethesda Hospital intensive care section when the former rector of the Christian University (UKDW) Dr. Judo Poerwowidagdo (\*1942), President of the Asian Christian Art Association (ACAA) and his predecessor in this function Prof. Dr. Masao Takenaka (1925-2006) from Japan – who both provided Bagong with spiritual guidance for many years – prayed with him, that he found peace again. Following the Javanese way, he greeted his family and friends and asked them for forgiveness for his failures and shortcomings. He was buried according to Christian rites. "Bagong's legacy will be continued by his children, who have followed his steps to be dancer, musician and actor".<sup>6</sup>

## *Jesus teaches the crowd*

An unusual perspective! In the center of the picture Jesus faces his listeners, with his back turned towards the viewer. He wears a white, worn-out garment, with a scarf hung loosely around his neck. Caught by a gust of wind, it flutters to the right. His arms are spread like wings. The left one is stretched out to the side at shoulder height. His hand droops slightly toward the ground, palm open and facing downward. His right arm is raised upwards at an obtuse angle, index finger pointing to the right. He is stepping forward slightly on his right foot on which the weight of his body seems to rest.

<sup>4</sup> It is said that producing paintings by applying the batik technique was introduced in Yogya by Bagong in the 1970s.

<sup>5</sup> Masao Takenaka and Ron O'Grady (eds), *The Bible through Asian Eyes*, Auckland etc. 1991, 164.

<sup>6</sup> Judo Poerwowidagdo, *In Memoriam Bagong Kussudiardja*, in: *image*, No. 99, June 2004, 10.

Jesus' body language gives the impression that he is not only preaching the gospel in words, but dancing it at the same time. The two figures standing closest to him on his left are clapping in time to the rhythm.

His listeners are fishermen. Gaunt characters, dressed only in loincloths, without individual facial expressions – painted in semi-abstract fashion. To the right in the foreground some sit on the sand. The persons in the background give the impression of shadow puppets (*wayang*). Allusions can be perceived to an imagined oriental Palestine mixed with Javanese local color. The painting is kept in grey, brown and ochre. Under the clouds that gather at the horizon the ocean is only hinted at. Jesus did not turn his back on us, but takes us with him into his preaching of the gospel. Following him we shall spread the good news further.

### **Christ and the Fishermen**

This painting on the same subject marks a rupture with the classical accommodation and inculturation art that give the universal Christian message a local expression. While the accommodation model tries to keep form and content separate, the inculturation model makes them interact in such a way that they can no longer

be separated.<sup>7</sup> The traditional Indonesian fishing boats in the background are nostalgic. They suggest that Jesus Christ has arrived at a beach in the Indonesian islands. Shadowy figures are on their way to go fishing, just as Jesus' disciples were, at the Sea of Galilee 2000 years ago. The group of people in the foreground evokes a quite different impression. Jesus in a blue bathing suit and muscle shirt, shoulder-length hair, full beard and hip metal-rimmed sunglasses, spreads his arms in an all-encompassing gesture. He attracts the full attention of the fishermen standing and crouching around him. Some of the contours of these figures remind the beholder of shadow puppets. They are mainly dressed in shorts and T-shirts. Their skin-color ranges from black, brown and red to the white skin of the person at Jesus' back. Contrary to the common habit of claiming Jesus for the particular context, the artist plays here with the universal dimension of Christian faith. The casual clothes, the signature of global youth culture, symbolize at the same time the irruption of modernity into Indonesian society. Plural modernities, integrating the western hyperculture of consumer capitalism in a hybrid mix of different influences into their own culture, have already developed. Jesus Christ is present amongst all this.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Volker Küster, *Accommodation or Contextualisation? Ketut Lasia and Nyoman Darsane – Two Balinese Christian Artists*, in: *Mission Studies* 16, 1999, 157-172.



### Cruxifiction III

The artist dissolves the crucifixion scene into a semi-abstract color play. The background is built up of black, white, green and blue color zones that merge at the borders. In the center of the picture in front of an open triangle structure tapering upwards hangs the *Corpus Christi* in shiny white. The shadowy visible shaft of the cross is the world axis separating the picture into two halves, while the crossbeam is marked only by the horizontally extended arms of Jesus. A square in multiple interrupted red lines that is crossed by two diagonals is drawn underneath the triangle. The godly triangle – evocative of the tree of life of the wayang (*gunungan*) – is raised above the world square. The coloring inside and around the geometrical figures is much more uneven and rich in contrasts – red and ochre playing into yellow are dominant – compared to the calm surface of the background.

The crucified himself is redolent of Picasso's *Guernica* or the torn bodies on the triptychs of Francis Bacon. The top of the triangle is built up of blue and yellow brush strokes. This abstract hint of resurrection is in contrast with the mutilation of the body suggested by the graphic deconstruction. A few black lines and points seem to outline the crown of thorns. A head cannot be identified. Torture, death and hope for resurrection are in fragile balance.

Bagong shows a clear tendency to move away from the inculturation mode of Christian art in Indonesia to a more hybridized, *glocal* style that negotiates between the global and the local. The coloring changes from muted brown tones to bright color and the style from relatively figurative to semi-abstract. Continuity lies in the iconographic orientation toward dance and wayang.





## 2. HENDARTO

Hendarto was born 1951 in Bandung, where his father, who served in the army, was stationed. Most of his life, however, he spent in Yogyakarta close to the Sultan's palace (*kraton*). He has been raised in the sphere of Javanese Islam, which mystical heritage still leaves traces in his work. The artist converted to Catholicism only in the early 1980s, yet he had already attended a Catholic school, where he was attracted especially by religious education. His family did not practice Islam, therefore his conversion to Christianity did not really pose a problem for them. His older brother and a younger sister followed his example, while the rest of the family remained Muslim. Hendarto is married and has two children. His son graduated in media studies and works as a filmmaker.

Even in art education Hendarto, who had been painting since his early childhood, was always the best in the class. He dropped out of his architecture studies to work as a freelance artist. In the beginning he experimented with wayang-style, batik, ceramics and wood-carving. He chose his teachers from among the artists in his neighborhood. Autonomy is important to him. Since his conversion to Christianity, Hendarto also depicts Christian themes: first sketches, aquarelle and batik, later oil and acrylics. For him, painting is at the same time a theological learning process – he tries to grasp the deeper sense of the Christian faith. Painting a Christian theme may take a long time. The artist meditates and has to concentrate himself fully on the subject. Therefore the number of his Christian

paintings is limited. He says himself that he cannot always consider such themes, because it is too hard on him.

### **Adam and Eve**

In the center of the picture hangs the apple, easily accessible on the lowest branch of the tree. Adam and Eve sit naked on a steep area beneath its roots. Adam squats in the lotus position, his private parts already covered with leaves. He glances up into the top of the tree, where more apples grow. He has put his arm under Eve's as she kneels at an angle in front of him. Her eyes are lowered, as if hypnotized by the red eyes of the darting snake, held towards her by a bald-headed, naked *dschinn* with tapered ears and erect tail. This reference to the devil in Islamic tradition can be understood as a hint of the Muslim roots of the artist. All three figures have long, slender limbs, typical of Hendarto's imagery. In the

spirit of wayang they portray a character.

The lines for the ground in the lower part of the picture as well as the abstract blue background, and even the trunk, branches and leaves of the tree all seem to have been caused to vibrate by the red glowing apple in the epicenter. In the next moment Eve will take a bite and thereby deeply influence the fate of humanity.

### **Baptism**

Jesus and the Baptist, who is still taller than him, enter the scene from the right. The contours of their bodies are similar to those of Javanese shadow puppets. Both have long hair and moustaches. Their torsos are naked, with a cloth over the left shoulder. The lower parts of their bodies are wrapped in sarongs. At John's left side dangles a vessel, which we assume will serve to scoop the baptismal water. The two protagonists are already standing in the flowing waters.







Surprisingly the bird flying over the head of the Baptist is not coming down from above, but seems to be flying up. The structure of the abstract background and the streamlined bodies of the figures emphasize this upward movement. Jesus is for the artist in the first place a human being that has to be raised up to heaven first.

### *The resurrected*

Jesus sits in the center of the painting, solid as a rock. His body divides the picture visually into two color fields along the diagonal that runs from the lower left to the upper right. In the upper part waves of godly sunlight seem to glide over Jesus' body. In their epicenter glows the gold yellow ball of the sun. The breath of God's spirit brings the elements into motion. The seated figure seems to be supported from below by plant like forms in green and grey that form a directional con-

trast with the curving lines of the sunlight.

Jesus appears as a Javanese youth with long black hair. His right shoulder is uncovered. Around his body a cloth plays loosely, seeming to flow into the colors of its surroundings. His lowered eyes suggest he is lost in deep thought. On his left foot one can identify the mark of the cross. Hendarto, due to his Muslim background, is still struggling with Christology. While the earthly Jesus is familiar to him – the Quran knows him as a prophet and predecessor of Mohamed – the godly side of Jesus Christ remains a mystery to the artist. Hendarto's Christian paintings are personal testimonies of faith, which express his esthetic-theological struggle with the Christian message in the light of Javanese-Muslim mysticism.



### 3. HARI SANTOSA

Hari Santosa was born in 1952 in Yogyakarta, the fifth of seven children of a Chinese-Indonesian family. No religion was practiced in his home. Hari however had attended Catholic institutions since his elementary schooldays. Influenced by his junior high school teachers, he finally chose to be baptized when he was fifteen. As a consequence his whole family converted to Christianity, one after another. Though he studied at the art academy (ASRI) he never received a degree. Santosa is an active member of the Catholic Church. He serves as a pro-deacon during Eucharist, plays organ and sings in the choir. However, the atelier for children that he also started in the congregation continues nowadays in his home. From his days as an art teacher at a Catholic elementary school (1984-1998), remains a collection of more than a thousand colorful bible illustrations drawn by children that serves him as a source of inspiration. Santosa has published a number of illustrated children's and coloring books himself. Today he works freelance as a children's art teacher and an illustrator. He is married but has no children.

In the 1990s he began to paint, not only secular, but also Christian motifs. Anyone who has seen his picture books easily recognizes the depicted figures, especially the animals. At the same time his style is reminiscent of the temple reliefs of Borobudur and Prambanan that are familiar to him thanks to their location in the vicinity of Yogya. Balinese influences are also visible. The Catholic Church shows little interest in his work, but the Chinese Buddhists of Yogya have discovered him. He has designed a calendar for them and has produced a four volume illustrated edition of the Dharmapala. Yet Santosa dreams of illustrating the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation and of establishing his own museum to make his art accessible to a broader public.

#### *Noah's Ark*

Here the bow of the wooden ark pushes through a wave at full speed. On board is a whole zoo of animals, among which many are well known from Santosa's children's books. Noah stands in their midst leaning on a rod, his left hand raised in greeting. A halo surrounds his white hair and his long beard hangs over the rail. More animals watch through the portholes. The dove flies ahead.

The flood is bursting into the streets of Jakarta, capital of a country that is constantly shaken by natural disasters. Yet in the foreground one can see quite another flood wave: heads of demonstrating people, shouting with mouths wide open. They bear flags and banners. Their protest is meant to wash away ubiquitous corruption. Santosa interprets the story of the Flood as a political parable. Though the subject is presented in a modern manner, the earthen colors and the frame integrated into the painting are reminiscent of stone temple reliefs.

#### *The Three Magi*

The three magi enter the picture from the left. Their mounts, elephant, camel and horse, as well as their different clothes and headgear, make them a colorful oriental party. On the back of the mighty elephant sleeps one of the magi. Suggestive of Hindu or Buddhist sculptures, he lies sidewise on the comfortable saddle, protected by an umbrella, trusting to the skills of the mahout. The vessel holding his present he has set in front of himself without a care. Next to him, the camel rider in his Arabian dress and turban holds a decanter before him as his present. The third person, riding in front, wears a fez and casual clothes of a simply cut jacket, short trousers and sandals. He is also holding a gift vessel. Two children with drum and toy wooden horses run

towards them, performing a dance popular in Java (*Kuda Lumping*).

In an open Javanese structure, a sort of pavilion, Mary sits beside baby Jesus, who is wrapped in cloth and lying on straw. Behind her stands Joseph, a bamboo stick in his left hand, his right index finger raised. Both are dressed in sarongs. All three have halos. Above the child the star of Bethlehem sends out its rays. The cow behind them, the sheep and birds around their feet, produce a pastoral impression. Yet in the background the reality of the mega cities of this world irrupts into the picture. A metropolitan traffic jam can be seen on a bridge before an urban skyline, where, besides the Eiffel Tower, two other buildings in the centre stand out that are suggestive of the Twin towers.

### **Entry into Jerusalem**

Jesus is entering the city on horseback. He wears a simple shirt, short trousers and sandals. He has long hair and a beard, and his head, surround by a halo, is turned toward the viewer. His index finger points towards heaven. Two small children ride with him on his saddle, one in front and one behind. Next

to him a slightly older child runs along on his toy wooden horse. On the other side of the horse a man carries a long-handled umbrella to protect Jesus' head from the sun's rays.

The city appears as a fortress, with the representatives of power – a general, a businessman, a priest, a politician and a judge, along with their henchmen – watching from the walls. In the colonnades hang images of a palm leaf and a sacramental cup with host. The establishment shall be shaken to its foundations. The prince of peace, who goes to suffering to overcome death, enters the city.

The crowd in front of the gate is mixed. People are spreading cloths in Jesus' path. Pennants wave from a balcony. In the background a village decorated with flags lies on the slopes of a volcano, its cone emitting smoke. Just underneath the peak the well-known capital letters read "Gollywood", probably an allusion to Mel Gibson's "Passion of the Christ". Hari Santosa is representing the classical accommodation model. Form and content can still be separated. He knows however how to combine the local with the global, thus exceeding the boundaries of mere indigenization.







## 4. DOPO YEIHAN

Born into the family of the 7th Sultan of Yogyakarta in 1964, Dopo Yeihan is a painter, actor, filmmaker and journalist equally autodidact. His father before him was not only journalist and author of wisdom literature, but also committed to the whole range of traditional theater, drama, dance and gamelan music. His mother produced and sold batik. His three older brothers are musician, dancer (assistant to Bagong) and businessman, who gradu-

ated from the art academy. Their sister is a housewife. Dopo, who dislikes formal educational structures, finished his educational career with high school. Yet he made good use of the intellectual circles with which his father was associated. From Abujasin, the father of Indonesian literature, Dopo picked up journalism. He watched his uncle Bagong, his father's twin, over his shoulder when he was painting and learned modern dance from him. For traditional dance he observed his brother. Affandi



too was a friend of his father. That Doyo also sympathized with W.S. Rendra (1935-2009), the pioneer of modern theater in Indonesia, provoked Bagong's displeasure (Bagong was suspicious of this street urchin). Finally, photography and film he learnt from the influential Jesuit father Ruedi Hofmann, S.J. (1938-2008). Since 1985 he has worked for the art and media department of the Christian Duta Wacana University in Yogyakarta to earn a living. He is married and has three children, two daughters and one son. The early death of his first son at the age of seven (1999) left him deeply distressed and had a heavy impact on his artistic work as well. Doyo is an artist and activist at the same time. His exclusively Christian motifs often deal with social evils. His images of Mary Magdalene are a good example.

### ***Two Mary Magdalenes or the Balad of two underage Workers***

Mary Magdalene has several times served the artist as a representative figure for young In-

onesian women suffering the consequences of patriarchy and neocolonial structures. The fifteen-year-old Marsiam and fourteen-year-old Wati, Muslim girls from Cirebon, West Java were lured into prostitution with false promises of jobs. When the right of the first night was about to be sold, they were able to flee at the last minute, half naked. A man had pity for them and brought them to police custody. He also supplied them with new clothes. Parallels with the message of Mt 25,31-46 and the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10,25-37) open up.

In the painting it is Jesus Christ who seems about to wrap the two girls into a white cloth – the symbol of purity. We see only his forearms and hands as he holds the cloth, as well as his face just above its upper edge. The closed eyes and the evenly proportioned face express compassion. Composition and style are reminiscent of the Christ portraits of Salvador Dali. The two girls, the one on the right naked, and the one on the left dressed only in a slip, sit on a creased red sheet. Their heads bowed in shame, they have turned their backs to the viewer. In the foreground stands a broken piggy bank in the form of a rooster. A nail of the cross is stuck in the middle of the lower edge of the picture.

### ***Magdalene's Turning back***

The reason for making Mary Magdalene a figure representative of young Indonesian women from the lower echelon of society lies in her identification with the nameless sinful woman in Lk 7,36-50, who comes to anoint Jesus. In western tradition this was formative. Mary Magdalene is shown in numerous medieval depictions with her vessel of ointment. From liberation theology we know the change of perspective in the teaching about sin that sees in the poor and oppressed those who are sinned against.

The artist got his inspiration for this picture from the story of Marni, a 24-year-old household helper, who had to serve her employer sexually as well. After three years she got in contact with Christian faith and became empowered to resist his sexual abuse and finally run away. She managed to build a new existence for herself as a vendor of traditional herbs.

The painting shows Marni/Mary huddling on the ground scantily clad. She sits to one side, legs bent, supporting her torso with her arms. Her head is lowered and her long hair falls forward, hiding her face from view. The left strap of her transparent bra has slipped down her upper arm. Her abdomen is covered only by a transparent touch of cloth. In the right upper corner of the picture one can see a pair of hands, rising out of shadowy sleeves. They seem to embrace somebody or something. The artist's surrealist style is similar to Dali even in coloring.

The posture of the young woman expresses the humiliation that she has had to bear for many years. The gracefulness with which she sup-

ports herself with the fingers of her right hand, is however a sign, that she is awakening to new life. Knowing that she is embraced by the arms of the crucified, she will resist discrimination by society.

### *Gethsemane*

Occasionally Dopo has also painted images of Christ. Jesus is seen here squatting with his left knee resting on the ground, and his right knee bent in front of him. His right hand rests on his left leg, his left arm is held at a right angle before his breast, his left hand held against his right upper arm. His head droops forward and tufts of long black hair hang from his temples. The features of his face are not defined. In any case, the figure makes a distorted and semi-abstract impression. The blue body is set against an abstract background that changes from dark blue to violet. Artistically Dopo is influenced by Dali's surrealism and his uncle Bagong. The two styles exist a bit uncomfortably in his work and seem somewhat disconnected next to each other.



## 5. WISNU SASONGKO

The new shooting star of the scene is Wisnu Sasongko, the angry young man among Indonesia's Christian artists. Wisnu was born into a Christian family in Jakarta (\*1975), his parents having converted from Islam to Christianity. They moved with their children to Yogya. The mother is a dancer and Gamelan player; the father works as a teacher at a school for mentally handicapped children. His sister Wiwik is also artist, specializing in design.

Wisnu relates to a personal born again experience he had in 1998, in the context of political upheaval provoked by the new order policy of President Suharto. The riots were also directed against the Christian minority. This experience had direct impact on his artistic work and from then on he painted Christian themes. He wanted to meet discrimination and violence with the spirit of hope.<sup>8</sup> He caused tension at the art academy by submitting a piece of art inspired by his Christian faith for his finals. From 2005 he taught at the technical faculty of Duta Wacana Visual art and Design for some years. He pursued with a master in cultural studies (2006-2010) and, after finishing his master's thesis on socialist influences in the works of Indonesian artist Hendra Gunawan, Sasongko is considering whether to go for his PhD.

### *Nativity*

Everything is centered around Mary with the child in her arms as she sits on a wooden bench. The poles and the roof of the open structure that shelters them are more similar to an antique temple than a simple stable. The double gable bears depictions of a star and a decanter or tankard. Two sheep and three people watch the child from behind. To the left a band – double bass, fiddle and drum –

is playing. To the right three women seem to be dancing to their tunes. Above them other people carry long yokes with gamelan instruments on their shoulders. The largest of the four mountains on the horizon, picturing Javanese volcanoes, seems to produce flowery clouds. In the left corner a man stands in the open doorway of a round hut. Beneath the band four sheep stand in a row and watch the baby. To the right the three magi, one with a bird on his shoulder, are kneeling.

At the bottom of the picture farmers are carrying their rich harvest. A woman coming from the well balances a water jar on her head. In the fish-laden water float two fishing boats. The rich vegetation and fauna give the impression of abundance and the joy of life. The figures remain shady and their facial expressions are not worked out. Sasongko here practices a spontaneous watercolor-like style that gives the painting a touch of naivety.

### *Night in Gethsemane*

The painting shows another of Sasongko's style variants: oil painting reminiscent of art brut and Jean Dubuffet. Jesus is kneeling in front of a square stone on which he rests his elbows. A bird is coming toward him. Behind him stands an over-sized cup. The whole picture is compartmentalized into geometrical forms, mainly squares of different sizes, some of which contain elements of vegetation. In a big square in the lower half of the painting the three sleeping disciples seem to have been transformed into fish. The five figures depicting the soldiers coming to arrest Jesus bring to mind Indonesian tribal art. The six figures at the top might look forward to the angel at the open tomb and the mourning women.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the title of the catalog *Wisnu Sasongko, Think on these Things. Harmony and Diversity*, New Haven, CT: OMSC publications 2007.





## Laughing Jesus

With his spectacles, beard and long black hair, Jesus looks like one of Sasongko's artist friends. The portrait's green background is full of icons of the brave new computer world. Jesus, anno 2012, is on facebook and twitter; e-mail is already obsolete. The artist himself once stated: „I don't want to paint biblical stories because I've never seen them, I've never touched them, and I've never seen what Jesus looked like. As an artist I can only imagine Jesus".<sup>9</sup>

Sasongko can already look back on several solo- and group exhibitions. He absorbs a varied mixture of stylistic influences from Indonesian artists like Widayat (1923-2002), but also the Philippino Emmanuel Garibay (\*1962) and western artists Paul Klee or Pablo Picasso. His paintings go beyond traditional inculturation art. They represent a new *glocal* Christian art.

The artists introduced here all have academic backgrounds. Most of them are connected in one way or the other to the local art academy ISI. But not every one has finished his formal education and learning from other artists; a certain autodidactic charm remains significant for them. Yet unlike traditionally trained artists, these so called "academicians" have

been exposed to western art traditions in a formal way. Hari Santosa is the only representative of the accommodation model, even if his political allusions blow the genre open. Bagong and Hendarto are inculturation artists. In his later work, however, Bagong already tends toward *glocal* art as practiced by Dopo Jeihan and Wisnu Sasongko. Besides Santosa, who has Chinese roots, all artists have a Muslim family background. Some are converts themselves; others are already second- or third-generation Christians. Besides Hendarto, who is clearly influenced by Javanese-Muslim mysticism, this heritage has not left any traces in their work. Hari Santosa has absorbed the Hindu-Buddhist iconography of Prambanan and Borobudur. In Bagong's case, dance and wayang of the Hindu-Javanese tradition have become decisive structural elements of his compositions. This plurality of religious influences mirrors the open atmosphere of the sultanate. Some of the artists show certain tendencies towards abstraction, most obviously Bagong and Wisnu; for Hendarto, at least regarding the background. The trend goes in the direction of a *glocal* art that plays with traditional iconographies and is not afraid of political critique.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Sasongko, *Think of these Things*, 5. This catalog contains many paintings that are drawn in a Christian spirit but do not depict biblical themes.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Volker Küster, *Christian Art in Asia. Yesterday and Today*, in: *id. et. al., The Christian Story. Five Asian Artists Today*, New York and London 2007, 28-43.



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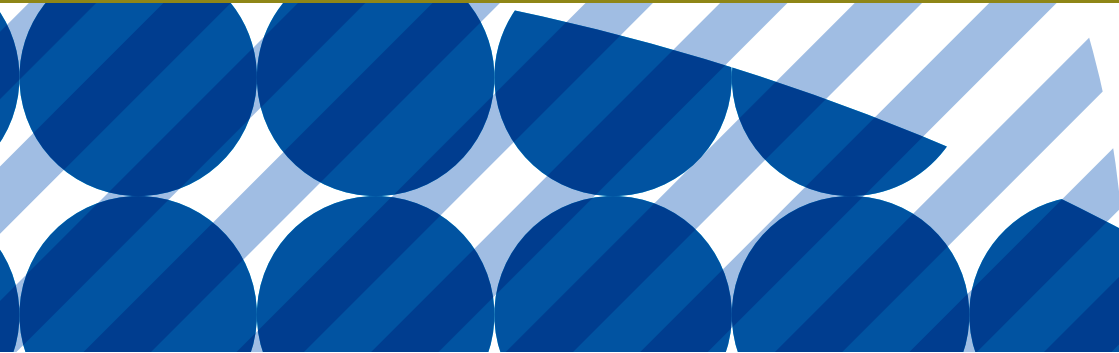








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