



Eddy Susanto in front of his Javascript appropriation of Durer. (JG Photo/Carla Bianpoen)

## Historical Fact, Fiction Meet in Eddy Susanto's 'Java Script' Exhibition

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**Jakarta.** Entering Eddy Susanto's solo exhibition "Java Script" at the National Gallery of Indonesia in Central Jakarta, one might initially be struck by the atmosphere of old Javanese manuscripts. But closer examination opens up layered revelations of contemporary significance.

Among these is the fascinating line of thought running through the artist's oeuvre, which takes the Javanese script as a central point for exploring comparative trends between worlds that lay far apart in time, space and culture.

At a time when many of his peers try to mimic popular trends in the international world of art, Eddy has delved into historical readings to create and innovate with art works that should come as eye-openers regarding the place of Java, as part of Indonesia, in the world constellation of art.

Similarities of sense and acts between Europe and Java are reflected in about 30 works in Eddy's solo exhibition at the National Gallery, which officially opened on Tuesday and runs through Sunday.

Spurred by findings during his historical research, Eddy found a similarity of spirit that entered Europe and Java at about the same period of time.

Elaborating, he said: "When a new spirit began with the Renaissance, which replaced the spirit of Memento Mori of the Middle Ages, a similar spirit was prevailing in Java, when the entry of Islam transformed the lives of the Javanese from their focus on sacred rituals to being involved in productive trading work."

He then took Albrecht Durer to represent that period of renewal in Europe, appropriating many of his works and outlining the contours of images with original texts written in Javanese script to represent a similar spirit prevailing in the respective Javanese narratives.

In one of his earlier works, "The Java of Durer," which earned him a prize in the second Bandung Contemporary Art Awards, he appropriated Albrecht Durer's "The Men's Bath" using Javanese script to shape the images. It was not just random scripture, but consisted of the original text of "Babad Tanah Jawi" ("History of the Land of Java") which he wrote with drawing pens over an



virtually the entire realms of Javanese philosophical thought, such as Ramayana, Bharatayudha, Joyoboyo, Sutasoma, Centhini, to name just a few.

But it is probably the works referencing current websites and networks that have the most direct relation to our contemporary culture. Eddy selected the world's most popular websites for his artistic experimentation with Javanese script, which writes the respective programs of the websites against the iconic color of their logos. These include Google, Yahoo, LinkedIn, Facebook and all that is popular in Indonesia.

However, he also includes websites that are popular abroad, such as China's Baidu, adding decorations typical of that country, such as images of the phoenix. At the bottom of each of these paintings is a device voicing *tembang sinden* (melodious tones by traditional female signers).

Surely the installation of 30 bird cages breaks the atmosphere of old documents. Displayed under the title "Cabinet of Curiosities," they compare with what was known in Europe as *Wunderkammer*, spaces that collectors used to display their body of collections.

But Eddy Susanto's cages may also refer to Damien Hirst's tiger shark preserved in a tank of formaldehyde. Filled with skulls of small lizards and other such creatures found in the vicinity of his studio, Eddy revealed he had reconstructed parts and pieces of bones that lay scattered around his studio after he and his friends had had them for dinner.

Eddy Susanto DEFINING THE NATION (1)

As we know, Soekarno (1901-1970) was not only an eloquent speaker but also an impressive writer. Pramodya (1925-2006) is known for his literary achievements, while RA Kartini (1879-1904) who is generally hailed as a pioneer for women's emancipation, was actually already elaborating about the national principles of Pancasila and current issues of plurality, before Indonesia as a state had come into being.

One may wonder about the similarity between Javanese scripture and javascript as a computer language in contemporary communication. Eddy explains that both emerge as a medium to communicate, each aligning to the needs of the time. The name Java in the hyper contemporary javascript, in his elaboration, originated in a cafe when its founders were seeking for an appropriate name. They were inspired by the coffee which came from Java, so they named their inventive language javascript. Fact or fiction?

More importantly, however, is Eddy's view about Javanese script that could have become the computer programming language "if we had been smart enough."

It is such absence that has spurred his art works in the series "Illuminations."

A discussion with the artist, his two curators and an art observer to be held on Sunday at 1 p.m. is expected to shed more light on the works that need extensive elaboration on their respective context.

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