He remembered the scene well. Three members of his revolutionary military unit had gathered around a table, inside a makeshift command headquarters. Ruminating on the events of the past few days and weeks, these men — friends of his, comrades — turned over what had been achieved, what had been lost, in this revolutionary struggle. Would the revolutionary forces push through to victory, or would the Dutch prevail? The artist would capture this heroic yet utterly ordinary moment in his painting *Meeting in Tjikampek* of 1964 (plate 1). And for the figure on the right — half-seated on the edge of the table, left leg partially extended — Seabad Sindudarsono Sudjojono alluded to the painting of Gustave Courbet: calling up the pose of the kneeling man on the right of *Stonebreakers* (1849–50). In that dark year of 1964, Sudjojono found himself alongside Courbet.

Sudjojono did three paintings that year: *Meeting in Tjikampek* (*Pertemuan Di Tjikampek yang Bersedjarah*), *Guerrilla Preparations* (*Persiapan Gerilya*) (plate 2); and *Rest* (*Ngaso*) (plate 3). In each painting, we see men deliberating or resting in a bombed-out building, that has been converted into a makeshift military outpost or encampment. All three are set during the years between 1945 and 1949, often known as the ‘Indonesian revolution’, when Indonesians — men and women, young and old, in towns and in the countryside — took up arms to repel the Dutch forces, who had returned after the Japanese occupation in an attempt to retake ‘their’ colony. No one could foresee during those years — not Sudjojono, who fought in the struggle, and who, periodically, had to flee with his family from captured town to captured town — that the country would achieve independence in 1950.

The three paintings were part of a project to memorialize the revolution. *Meeting in Tjikampek* and *Rest* were dedicated to Sudjojono’s close friends Anak Marhaen Hanafi and Adam Malik (since 1964, *Meeting in Tjikampek* and *Rest* have remained in a private collection, and were recently acquired by the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara, while *Guerrilla Preparations* has been on limited, non-public display in the Presidential Collection in Yogyakarta). I will consider these three paintings as a triptych, as they all hark back to that same moment in 1945–49. The three paintings are not narratively sequential; nor do we know the exact order in which Sudjojono completed them. The order I propose — *Meeting in Tjikampek* as the ‘first’, *Guerrilla Preparations* as the ‘second’, and *Rest* as the ‘third’ painting — will, at best, be provisional. As I shall argue, there is a progression of embodiedness across the three paintings that allows us to understand their historical temporality in 1964.

Though the triptych came as something of a renewal of realism for the artist in the 1950s, it was made during a period after 1959 in which Sudjojono had been expelled from the communist party, and was (seemingly) in retreat from politics. During this period of...
Courbet after Sudjojono


retrenchment, he turned to painting landscapes, nudes, and still lifes. Returning to Courbet would also have seemed belated, if not anachronistic, from the point of view of nineteenth-century French realism. The triptych also sits uneasily alongside the ‘social’ or ‘socialist’ realisms that proliferated in Russia, China, and other communist countries (socialist realism: an art that had, for the most part, traded in its revolutionary credentials for a dogmatic propaganda). Yet such a lack of historical fit is the corollary of early twentieth-century models of art history that rely on stylistic influence and linear chronology. What if such anachronism is instead something more revelatory, like a gap or rift in historical time?

This essay works away from such art-historical linearity by using the concept of ‘contemporaneity’. While contemporaneity – an artist’s or viewer’s inhabitation
of a conjunctive heterogeneity of times – has mostly been deployed in the study of contemporary art, the phenomenon to which it refers became available as early as the 1850s, with realism in France.\(^4\) (The word itself has a longer history: the Oxford English Dictionary dates the first citation of ‘contemporaneity’ to 1772, while the earliest occurrence of ‘contemporaneous’ – to exist or occur at the same time – was in 1656.) Realism inaugurated a different understanding of time: as artists aspired to hold onto the present, the now, realism simultaneously admitted an inescapable contradictoriness or heterogeneity in time. The archaic could linger in the present, as much as intimations of the future could be glimpsed in present time.\(^5\) Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood have tracked this non-linear time structure, which they call ‘the anachronic’, back to the fifteenth century, making it apparent that contemporaneity emerged against the linearity of chronological time.\(^6\)

Mid-nineteenth-century European artists exploited the increasing gap or tension between painting’s reference to reality, and naturalism’s ability to conjure up a convincing and coherent world.\(^7\) Contemporaneity grasps this tension between ‘external’ reference and ‘internal’ picturing, painting’s world-referring and world-creating functions.\(^8\) It may also help explain the peculiar sense of time one experiences in Indonesia: ‘Indonesia’s diversity is not just geographic and cultural’, travel writer Elisabeth Pisani recently noted. ‘[Different] groups are essentially living at different points in human history, all at the same time. ... Often, more-or-less ancient and relatively modern coexist in the same space; farmers get to their rice field on a motorbike, villagers film a ritual sacrifice on their mobile phones.’\(^9\)
My argument for Sudjojono’s contemporaneity with Courbet is an attempt to grasp the global-historical specificity, indeed historicity, of the 1964 triptych: what if we take its historical disjunction, its manner of being out of place and time, seriously? Instead of the cliché of realism as passively mimetic or illustrational, I argue for its importance as a world-making activity: the way that marks on a canvas can actively constitute a world for an artist-viewer. But insofar as historical writing on art also creates such ‘worlds’, this essay uses Sudjojono’s triptych to trouble the conventional historiography of realism. Might Courbet’s example have renewed importance for other global cultures, today? I will argue that the importance of the triptych lies in the inherent disjunctiveness in and of Sudjojono’s realism, and in the unusually precise manner in which he took up Courbet’s more radical version of realism in 1964. Working far from
the centres of global artistic production, at a moment of retreat and political desolation, Sudjojono’s triptych truly seemed out of time.

Let us begin in the 1930s, when Sudjojono, as a young artist in his twenties, turned away from the kind of painting that had then been favoured by Dutch elites (for example, plate 4). Such picturesque, ‘Beautiful Indies’ landscapes showed – or better, showed off – the beauty and bountifulness of the Indonesian islands. That such painting found renewed popularity in the Netherlands in the 1930s, during the worldwide Great Depression, indicates how far they were indeed expressions of colonial nostalgia. Sudjojono made his stance clear:

The paintings that we see nowadays are mostly landscapes: rice fields being ploughed, 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. Similarly there are paintings of women who must have red shawls fluttering in the wind ... Everything is very beautiful and romantic, paradisiacal, everything is pleasing, calm, and peaceful. ... But fortunately a new generation is coming up, a generation which carries the living seeds of a people who will live and who, together with other peoples, will soon arise ... A generation that will dare say ‘This is how we are,’ which means this is our condition of life now ... The new artist would then no longer paint only the peaceful hut, blue mountains, romantic or picturesque and sweetish subjects, but also sugar factories and the emancipated peasant, the motorcars of the rich and the pants of the poor youth; the sandals, trousers, and jacket of the man on the street.

The artist would, with fellow painter Agus Djajasuminta, form the art collective Persagi, spurring those around him to walk a different artistic path, to forge a modern art they could call their own.

One of Sudjojono’s first forays into realism was the painting Before the Open Mosquito Net (Di Depan Kelambu Terbuka, 1939; plate 5). A woman, of modest build and indeterminate age, leans forward on a chair, confronting the viewer. A sense of dejection hides,
perhaps, a deep anger. The corner triangles of the mosquito net remind us of the parted curtains in Raphael’s Sistine Madonna (1512) – and yet everything about the painting refuses the transcendental, refuses the world beyond. It is about the concrete presence of this woman in front of the artist-viewer. The rapid, cursory brushstrokes, the portions of the canvas left unpainted, indicate that Sudjojono was uninterested in either social or aesthetic refinement. His picture is far from any one of Basuki Abdullah’s cloying nudes (for example, plate 6), all prurient and tedious.17
In fact the woman in the painting is a prostitute, whom Sudjojono knew. There is, of course, something of Manet’s Olympia (1865) in her fixed, uncompromising stare. At least, the artist wanted to show the common humanity of those from hardscrabble backgrounds. The policing of prostitution had only recently been introduced in the first three decades of the twentieth century, when Dutch colonial authorities imposed policies of sexual hygiene onto the entire Indonesian population.\textsuperscript{18} The woman’s defiance was, then, in the face of increasing colonial control. But more than an instance of class identification between the artist and his subject, I would argue that the painting is about this woman’s sovereignty.\textsuperscript{19}

Some have contended that Sudjojono’s painting declined after this early spurt. According to anthropologist Claire Holt, in his work from the 1950s, ‘Sudjojono’s daring, his freshness in form and feeling were lost. Almost compulsively he now adopts

\begin{figure}
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Basuki Abdullah, The Goddess of the Southsea, c. 1940s. Oil on canvas, 159 \times 120 cm. Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Collection of the Republic of Indonesia Presidential Palace.}
\end{figure}
near-photographic rendering of what he terms reality. The painting "Neighbour" [plate 7] made in 1950 shows the transformation. By that time Sudjojono was espousing the brand of social (or socialist) realism preached by the Communists. For Holt, the consequence of Sudjojono toeing the party line was a painting that lacked vividness and, apparently, conviction. But did his realism really harden in the 1950s?

The 1964 triptych pulls against Holt’s judgement, which had itself been conditioned by the course of the Cold War. (By 1966–67, as Holt was putting the finishing touches to her book, the ideological line between liberal capitalism and communism had sharpened. The Gulf of Tonkin incident of 1964 was followed by increasing American military involvement in Vietnam.) All three paintings, again, take us back to the moment between 1945 and 1949, when the Dutch were trying to retake the country, making military incursions under the cover of what they euphemistically called ‘police actions’. By December 1948, the political leaders Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta were imprisoned on a remote island, and the situation looked grim.

After the Renville Agreement of 1948, Republican forces were confined to West Java and a central area around the capital of Yogyakarta. Residents of cities like Yogyakarta found themselves on the verge of starvation, due to the disruption of incoming food supplies. And yet, joined by bands of revolutionary youth (pemuda), the republican forces had never been more hopeful.21

Meeting is based on an encounter that took place between the guerrilla leaders Chaerul Saleh, Wikana and Hanafi, at the API (Angkatan Pemuda Indonesia) headquarters in Tjikampek, Central Java, in November 1945.22 The three men were travelling to Yogyakarta to attend a Youth Congress (held on 10 and 11 November). Sudjojono witnessed the meeting, and would later work his sketch into the painting in question. In the midst of overwhelming odds and possible defeat, these figures are poised and assertive. The man on the left – physically most dominant – seems to be speaking, one fist resting on hip. The man on the right, in more orthodox military fatigues, looks slightly away, as though contemplating the words just spoken. The man in the centre, seated behind the table, coolly smokes a pipe. The urgency of their conversation is communicated through pose and gesture. Aminudin Siregar, Indonesia’s foremost art historian on Sudjojono, writes that the painting transcends historical literalism: it does not aim to evoke ‘[a] fiery heroic attitude’. Instead, ‘it offers an insight into the ambiguous relationship between youth and the Revolution itself’.23 We are privy to some sort of pause in the battle, when soldiers rest, as the leaders gather, as though to plan the group’s next move.24 In removing some of the action from his earlier Seko (Perintis Gerilja; plate 8), made during the conflict in 1949, Sudjojono ironically enhances the drama.

The longer we look, the more the figures’ assertiveness gives way to something more complex. The largest two figures are almost half-turned toward us – as though we are...
being asked to enter the space in the foreground of the painting. The three individuals are set on a threshold between inside and outside, the open space of this bombed-out rice mill. (This inside/outside dynamic figures centrally in my essay, as it articulates the phenomenological dimension of these paintings.) Positioning these men on this threshold makes their strength and resolve draw from their very exposure and vulnerability.

The years between 1945 and 1949 were highly uncertain, militarily and politically. Neither side had the upper hand. The tactical ground shifted frequently, and things could have gone either way. Each new agreement signed with the Dutch only seemed to offer another set of compromises. Something of the desperation and uncertainty – yet hopefulness – of this moment is conveyed by the contrast between the assertive frontality and scale of the figures, and the ruined setting. It is as though our three revolutionaries are on the verge of staging the final battle that will complete the revolution. The painting, in its relative optimism, leans toward 1945 in mood.

Sudjojono’s painting eschews academic correctness: the area beneath the table, for instance, is a messy tangle of human and table legs. And yet this lower portion makes sense – it is as though the artist had so entered into the substance of the conversation that he had forgotten the area at the bottom, forgotten technical correctness as such. The bigger problem, I think, is that the viewer’s phenomenological entry into the painting has not been fully coordinated with the architecture of the open building. In a way, there is too much figure, and not enough ground (notice the lack of mediation between the three central figures and the two resting figures on the right). As we shall see, Sudjojono would, in his next two canvases, home in on the right section of the painting: foregrounding the sleeping and resting men, turning them into everyday heroes.

Sudjojono had depicted such half-inside, half-outside spaces before. Consider In a Village (Dalam Kampung, 1950; plate 9): a man watches over a baby in front of a village house, as we make out another building on the opposite side of the courtyard.
Though several trees obscure the upper portion of the central open area, the space feels aerated; shafts of light pierce through the canopy. Sudjojono would treasure the peaceful home that he shared with his then-wife, Mia Bustam, in contrast to the revolutionary years, when he had to move from shelter to temporary shelter. The baby optimistically hints at new beginnings, but of course also suggests another kind of birth – that of the new nation.

The painting can be read in terms of contemporaneity: while it fixes on the here and now – a moment in 1950 – it is nevertheless shot through with several unresolved temporalities. With regard to the time of the ‘village’, Dutch colonialism in Java and Sumatra had substantially altered what it meant to live in a ‘kampung’. By the late nineteenth century, village life increasingly meant poverty. The strength and power of the painting derive from the fact that, like the semi-open courtyard, it is a poised ambiguity. Does this painting try, in the Baudelarian manner, to wrest the eternal out of the transient? Or was Sudjojono simply saying that the eternal was transient, shot through with anachronic time? Elements of doubt and anxiety lurk within this seemingly hopeful depiction of village life, just after the revolution. Look at the sculptural head in the centre foreground – of the artist’s wife, no less – which feels less reverential than ominous. The juxtaposition of hard stone against soft baby is strangely compelling. Our initial sense of euphoria is dampened, as the painting becomes a little tenuous, the mood less secure.

In the 1950s, Sudjojono returned to realism as the mode that could truly capture the struggles of the people, and the hopes of a new nation. He called this a ‘realism of rice’. In the 1950s he was involved with the Institute of People’s Culture (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, LEKRA). LEKRA was the cultural arm of the PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia) or communist party that brought together a diverse group of artists and students, and experimented with art and cultural projects that broke down distinctions of class and culture. Javanese wayang (shadow puppetry), for instance, was used to tell non-Indonesian stories, while the use of unconventional materials found the genre new audiences.

LEKRA in the early 1950s in many ways revived the nationalism of the 1920s and 1930s. But the organization began to decline towards the late 1950s. After the 1959 meeting of the National Congress in Solo, the PKI became too involved in the art organization. The LEKRA membership split between those who believed that art should coincide with politics, and those who favoured art’s autonomy. Creativity and experimentation in teaching method began to decline. Artistic practice across the country became more centralized, as enemies of aesthetic doctrine were identified and publicly repudiated. LEKRA’s failure paralleled failures in the political realm: if, for instance, the early 1950s was infused with talk of multiparty democracy, by the late 1950s, Sukarno – in power for about a decade – became more authoritarian. (While authoritarianism, in both artistic and political realms, seemed like an aberration in the late 1950s and early 1960s, some historians have argued that democracy was the bigger anomaly in the long history of Indonesia.) In the early 1960s, LEKRA helped strengthen the PKI’s mass base, and Sukarno’s hegemony. Quite ironically, LEKRA ended up bolstering the postcolonial state.

By 1964, when Sudjojono painted his triptych, the revolution was no longer being realized in the daily rhythms of LEKRA pedagogy and artistic practice. Artists like Sudjojono felt that they needed to recapture those heady years of the late 1940s, when art and life, life and politics, were inseparable. Sudjojono would dedicate the three paintings to his comrades Hanafi and Malik. That these paintings are based on a memory, but one shot through with scepticism and doubt, qualifies them as ‘realist’. 
What had been a revolutionary utopia ended up in disaster and ruin: such was the historical contradiction of 1964. Sudjojono, I argue, gradually came to an awareness of the historical contradiction he was dealing with as he moved from the first to the third canvas. And in so doing, he was in search of a historical logic that ran beneath that very contradiction.

What is striking about the second and third paintings is how they force some sort of dissonance between war and the everyday. More than the simple notion of war disrupting or destroying the everyday, the paintings allude to a more disturbing condition when one cannot be distinguished from the other, as in states of emergency, anarchy, or lawlessness. In Guerrilla Preparations, three figures at the centre — as in the first painting — are engrossed in discussion, perhaps deliberating the group’s next move. Compared to the first painting, they have been substantially diminished in scale. The artist has populated the picture with more individuals resting, or doing nothing at all; it is as though the second painting has enlarged the right section of the first painting. On the left, two men sleep, while another, standing, has just put on his trousers (the laundry line seems carried over from the first painting). On the right, five men in the far background stand or sit, while in front of them, three men lie on the floor. Further in front, an older man ties his shoelaces. A miscellany of objects adds tangibility to this peculiar non-drama: on the far left, a red jerry can, a pair of boots, some rope, a wooden pail. The laundry line at left evokes daily rhythms, the everyday. (The theme of preparation makes this like one of Degas’ dance rehearsal paintings: we are being shown the backstage of the revolution.) Ironically, the resting and sleeping men have become the unlikely heroes of the painting. They engage in specific tasks at hand, such as the tying of shoelaces, or the donning of pants. How unusual — maybe radical — to have the everyday be the futural condition that results from the revolution’s completion.

The most striking figure is, I think, the man, dressed in a green fatigue top, who squats, a toothbrush dangling from his mouth. The toothbrush suggests the repetitious brushing of one’s teeth — an extended, more durational temporality. It is striking how Sudjojono foregrounds this individual: facing ninety degrees away from the viewer, he is the most absorptive figure in the composition. While the man rests his hands on a thick leather briefcase, suggesting some connection to knowledge or information, his idleness takes away from any sense of action or purpose. The dangle of his toothbrush alludes, more broadly, to the precariousness of the group’s existence: would they survive the next day?

The squatting man is not scaled to correct proportion. It takes a few seconds to notice this; if he stood up, he would tower over the three standing figures directly behind him. But again, rather than a mistake, it is as though the artist wanted to preserve the disjunction between the standing and squatting figure(s) at the centre of the painting, or between foreground and background. When we focus on the squatting man, the standing figures take up a position in our blind spot — they enter our periphery of vision. I suggest that the artist was trying to incorporate the standing figures into the everyday, thereby purging whatever was left of action from the painting. By incorporating the deliberating men, Sudjojono could have folded the revolution into the long history of Indonesia. Forgetting the more heroic and active side of the revolution could have been a way to retrieve other histories — or better, the possibility of history. The main conceptual crossing in the painting, then, seems to be this: the viewer’s phenomenological entry is coordinated with the becoming-everyday of the revolution. As punctual time cedes to a more durational temporality, rational thought gives way to a more inhabited consciousness of the body.
And yet the everyday in this painting ultimately feels stated, rather than fully worked through. No doubt the latter has been done to a degree; the toothbrush man and the man tying his shoelaces are two compelling instances. We see the problem in the open landscape at the far right rear of the painting. Two wooden doors open out onto a bright vista, complete with trees and an angled, brownish patch of ground, beyond a white wall. Our eyes race towards this background vista; yet it seems too brightly lit – like a bad dream of the revolution. It is as though Sudjojono, for a brief moment, slipped back into doing the Beautiful Indies painting he had once decried. However necessary an element in the painting, the open landscape seems too conventionally utopian, too literal an image of freedom. Ironically, it works against the calm assurance of the everyday in the rest of the painting. Sudjojono’s recoil from the faux-utopian landscape would, however, have allowed him to better calibrate the relation between the world-referring and world-creating aspects of his next painting.

In the third painting, Rest, we see more members of the people’s troops (laskar rakyat) sleeping or resting in a ruined building. What looks at first like a picture of soldiers’ languor and exhaustion – maybe even defeat – is, yet again, one of an ambiguous, and unconventional, heroism. In the bottom half of the painting, four men are resting or asleep, while another man, at right, sits on the floor, his back propped up by a crate. In the upper half, two men, seated, are on alert, while another, dressed in white shirt and hat, looks out onto a burning landscape. It soon dawns on us that the difference between lower and upper halves had been the dynamic in the first two paintings all along: the turn between sleep and wakefulness, rest and alertness. By foregrounding the sleeping men, the artist seems to force the opposition, pushing the terms of the first and second paintings.

The turn between sleep and wakefulness, or dream and reality, may refer not just to the history of the revolution, but revolution as a form of history. What if revolution is that which constitutes, rather than merely disrupts, normative reality? Look, for instance, at how the bodies of the topmost two sleeping men ambiguously merge into each other: the top man’s left arm doubles as the left arm of the man below him; it is as though the bottom figure is the same top figure, rotated. Caught between dream and empirical seeing, vignettes like these work to constitute the painting. Or look at the green-framed window on the left wall, which opens out onto another room. More than a literal view into another room, the green-framed structure calls attention to the fact that the very painting we are looking at is an Albertian window. Such a moment of reflexive consciousness pulls us out of durational time, dropping us back into prosaic reality, linear time. Moving beyond mere illusionism, these devices contribute to the world-creating aspect of the painting.

In the second painting, the open landscape on the right – a window of sorts – functioned as the collective dream of the figures in the foreground. But that was too literal, too naïvely utopian. This painting puts a destroyed town or building in the distance, billowing with black smoke. Even the room beyond the green window is bathetic – no release or freedom there. Compared to the first and second paintings, there is less of a diagonal rush, or indeed teleology, from the interior to the open landscape. Neither flight nor consolation, then, from the immanence of the room, the world these men inhabit. And yet the concrete realism of this painting seems to depend on its very phantasmagoria (of the three paintings, the third is especially hallucinatory). Instead of the simple identificatory heroism of the first painting, or the easy utopianism of the second, the third painting intertwines ‘dream’ and ‘reality’, or has them circle around each other. Reality is haunted by dreams, punctured by the spectral. This can be understood historically: the artist and his comrades, Hanafi
and Malik, had been troubled by this gathering that took place during the revolution. Forever marked by it, the moment determined, and kept determining, the course of their future lives. It was a constitutive haunting.

The third painting doesn’t move us straightforwardly from present to future, in the way that the Nationalist leaders of the 1920s–1940s, for instance, had adopted a futural orientation with regard to their politics. Instead, here the present seems to continually circle back to the past. During the years of the revolution, guerrilla fighters moving across central Java saw their struggle through the lens of Prince Diponegoro’s battle against the Dutch in the 1820s. Particular landscapes could conjure up deep histories, providing much-needed encouragement for these beleaguered fighters. But what was that dream or vision now, in 1964, after the many failed efforts of LEKRA? Was it to be discerned in the scene as a whole, or gleaned from this peculiar assemblage of bodily micro-histories?

The painting’s circular structure helps explain the trope of a ladder or staircase. In Rest, we see a small ladder propped against the bottom edge of the window frame, in the opposite room, and another vertical ladder outside the building, just beyond the left edge of the rubbed window. (A staircase also appears in the left foreground of Guerrilla Preparations.) Sudjojono’s ladders trade linearity or uni-directionality for an in-betweeness and suspension. Put simply, the ladder is an immanent motif. How do we remain ‘in’ the revolution, rather than accede to the false promise that is victory? How do we keep the revolution ‘in’ the everyday, in the fabric of our daily lives? On the far left of the painting, we find three letters scribbled on the wall: ‘eka’. These function as a synecdoche, a part that stands for a whole. They form, of course, the word ‘merdeka’, Indonesian for freedom. But here freedom seems thwarted, cut off before the revolution was completed – or maybe, before it had even begun.

Ruins are depicted in all three canvases. The ramshackle building these men find themselves in, however, functions as more than just a mere setting. Most obviously, the ruin connotes the fall of the old colonial regime (much like those Renaissance paintings of the Adoration of the Magi, for example by Fra Angelico and Filippo Lippi, c. 1440/60, in which the background ruin connoted the end of the old pagan order and the birth of a new Christian one). Indonesians in the 1940s through 1960s would have thought of the way the Javanese landscape was punctuated with ancient ruins, namely those of Borobudur and Prambanan. Sudjojono was trying to grasp the revolution – what drove it, what made it work – before it slipped into ruin. His ruins are more searching and exploratory; they have the quality of a laying bare, an exposure. If the men are literally positioned on a threshold in the first painting, by the third, that threshold has expanded to take in the entire room. That these men are also ‘in’ ruin – in the allegorical sense of the ruination that is subjectivity – allowed Sudjojono to better coordinate the setting with the phenomenology of the viewer. No longer mere backdrop, the ruin has become integral to the circular inside/outside structure of the painting. Instead of connoting a single, literal failure, the ruin brings about a prior and continual evocation of loss.

Across the three paintings, the artist wanted to incorporate activity into passivity, primarily in the way that the standing, deliberating figures are diminished in scale from the first to the second painting. With the greater number of sleeping and resting figures in the third painting, it is as though the male body has been lowered across the three paintings. If passivity can be coded female, it would make the room in the third painting an exceedingly feminized space. And yet Sudjojono complicates this linear movement from activity to passivity: for one, although we tend to read the painting from left to right, from passive to active bodies, the abruptness of the open landscape...
in the upper right throws us back onto the left-bottom portion of the painting. Look, too, at the way the artist depicts the leaning rifles on the left wall. He seems to have learnt from the flat pyre of spears on the centre column in the first painting; by the second, the leaning spears have become much more tangible, and illusionistically convincing. If leaning removes weapons from work, puts them to rest — leaning as defunctionalization — the rifles in the third painting are also ready-to-hand. Delicately mediating between floor and wall, the rifles in the third painting are in between active and passive, animation and pure thingness.

And what about the curious motif of the upright bamboo spear on the far right? Set on top of what looks like a block of stone, it has been defunctionalized in an odd sort of way. Much like the sculptural head at the centre of *In a Village*, the spear may be an ironized monument, a precarious idol. Though the bamboo spear was a weapon of the people and a potent symbol of the revolution (plate 10), it was also used in the group violence against Eurasians, Chinese and ethnic others during the period known as 'Bersiap', from August 1945 to December 1946. How much Sudjojono knew of this, we do not know: was he folding ambivalence into this object's strange depiction? In any case, the upright spear pictorially mediates between lower and upper halves of the painting. And like the rifles, it is strangely in between active and passive states, barely perceptible yet structurally crucial. It is not simply, then, that the triptych moves toward greater passivity, but that the third painting puts active/passive, male/female, inside/outside in dynamic suspension. Dialectical transcendence gives way to something more circular and paradoxical. Instead of a realism that merely depicted external reality, Sudjojono forged a painting that, more powerfully, kept painting and world in dynamic tension.
By the second and third paintings, Sudjojono stumbled onto what truly characterized Courbet: the embodiedness of his painting. In this regard, as the largest and most prominent figure in the third painting, the seated man on the right may allegorize the figure of the painter-beholder ‘in’ the painting. He may be looking at none other than the window on the left – as though looking at the painting he is currently working on. Strong realisms always allegorize their own process of creation; not coincidentally, I think, the man is reading a picture book. The figure was likely taken from Courbet’s Marc Trapadoux Examining a Book of Prints (1848) (plate 11), but rotated ninety degrees (notice the similar picture book, and the way the objects around the man contribute to his, and our, absorption). The seated man also resembles the figure with the toothbrush in the second painting, also turned ninety degrees away from the viewer (the figure comes through more fully as a painter-beholder in the third painting, despite the toothbrush functioning much like a paintbrush). At a minimum, these painter-beholder figures help to mediate between ‘subjective’ artist and ‘objective’ artwork. Or better, they help bring about
the very split between subject and object. Instead of an overall movement from ‘active’ to ‘passive’ from the first to the third painting, both states – coordinated with ‘male’ and ‘female’ respectively – intertwine or circle around each other in the third painting. The third painting can be said to be the most bigendered.\footnote{55}

The aporetic dimension of the third painting – with spatial circularity mapping onto temporal anachronism – resonates with the broader temporality operating in Indonesian society in the 1950s and 1960s. During the late 1950s, the long-standing conflict between Java and its neighbouring islands was rewritten as a struggle between Indonesia and the Dutch.\footnote{56} Such ideological rigidification was itself dependent on a reductive notion of history. In the late 1950s, the Indonesian state looked back to the ancient Majapahit empire for ideological support, but this was a forced reading of history – a linearization of time.\footnote{57} Sudjojono’s triptych, instead, consists of several unsynthesized shards of time: the early 1950s, a period of cultural openness and cosmopolitanism in LEKRA; the late 1950s to early 1960s, when temporal multiplicity gave way to, or was taken over by, temporal rigidification.\footnote{58} The fraught political circumstances in the years leading up to 1964 allowed Sudjojono to conjoin different historical moments, letting his painting exist as a temporal heterogeneity.

**Toward a Historiography of Realism**

The story of realism conventionally begins in France, with Courbet and other artists in the 1840s and 1850s.\footnote{59} Similar movements appeared, almost concurrently, in other European countries such as England, Germany and Spain, though realism in these countries was not always accompanied by the same leftist politics.\footnote{60} Realism changed complexion with ‘socialist realism’ in Russia and China, and took root in a variety of Asian countries such as India, Singapore, Japan, the Philippines and Indonesia, up to the 1970s.\footnote{61} One could argue that realism as a global phenomenon ceased with the fall of world communisms in the late 1980s. And yet realism never really ended: the realist impulse shifted to other media such as conceptual and performance art in many countries, with contemporary artists deploying realism to probe and question global capitalism and the aftermaths of communism; for example, The Propeller Group’s *Television Commercial for Communism* (2011); and Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook’s *Two Planets* (2007–08). The latter consists of video vignettes in which Thai rural villagers are shown reproductions of famous Western paintings, such as Jean-François Millet’s *The Gleaners* (1857) (**plate 12**). Instead of simply ironizing city or country folk, Rasdjarmrearnsook’s work juxtaposes urban and rural, Europe and Asia, dwelling on the multiplicitous encounter between two contiguous worlds.

Many recent studies of global realism stress uptake and diversity of reception over the style’s European origin. (Non-Western realisms and modernisms have long been derided for being inferior versions of European originals.)\footnote{62} Realism may better be thought of as a cluster of qualities, rather than a period style or movement. Thinking of realism less in terms of epistemology (mimetic correctness as truth value) than ontology may actually bring realism closer to many non-Western cultural and belief systems. What was ‘real’ had long been connected to religion and cosmology in these cultures, and this was disrupted – or better, interrupted – by fifteenth- to nineteenth-century Western optical or perspectival realism.\footnote{63} Western realism, in this sense, may have been a detour from a number of place-attuned, world-making systems.\footnote{64}

We could thus tell the story of artistic influence ‘from’ Courbet ‘to’ Sudjojono – but would this be sufficient? Curt Glaser’s article on Courbet, published in the
Indonesian newspaper *Jaw Bode* on 5 February 1936, was one possible point of transmission (plate 13). Glaser was a German art historian, who had trained under Heinrich Wölfflin. His article at first seems to praise Courbet from a formalist standpoint. But closer inspection shows how Glaser was departing from the conventional understanding of realism as mimetic reality:

> It is now difficult to understand that at that time this painting gave offence for no other reason than for being too lifelike. In it, the audience missed the degree of unreality that separates art from life, and that characterizes the aesthetic... They were rather inclined to accept the immediate reality in a still life of apples and flowers, a dead deer or a fish, than in a naked woman’s body.

Glaser is writing dialectically: Courbet’s politics, he is saying, lies in the cognitive blockage produced by the very autonomy of his painting – enough for many historical viewers to miss the point of his art. No evidence points to Sudjojono picking up Courbet’s
politics from Glaser’s article (despite Sudjojono being able to read Dutch); and yet what is compelling is less the line from Courbet through Glaser to Sudjojono, than how and why Courbet might have resonated for Sudjojono in 1936. During the nationalist 1930s, Sudjojono may have read Glaser’s article in a political light. Historians have contended that Sudjojono became politicized sometime in the 1930s, because of the inspiration of his then-wife, Mia Bustam, and possible meetings with dissident Indonesian revolutionaries. The question is also how and why Courbet became available for Sudjojono in 1964, as he was working on his triptych. While Keith Foulcher is correct in saying that LEKRA’s engagement with pre-existing national cultural forms meant that it ‘never pursued the question of a theory of radical aesthetics as such’ – in other words, aesthetic theory remained at the level of an acceptable socialist realism – the evidence of the paintings seems to suggest otherwise. Sudjojono’s triptych does appear to have broken with prevailing conceptions of what a realism could be.

Sudjojono’s example allows us to rediscover the problem of contemporaneity in the historiography of realism. In a seminal essay of 1941, Meyer Schapiro traced the operation of the related terms ‘child’, ‘primitive’, and ‘folk’ in Courbet’s art. He noted how, for Baudelaire, sculpture is the art par excellence of savages, ‘who carve fetishes very adroitly long before they undertake painting ...’. Though primitivism was a familiar way for Western artists to rediscover their own primal selves (e.g. Gauguin), in certain cases it allowed an artist to situate his own alienation and distance from a primal cultural source (e.g. Courbet).

In the 1840s, the folk was being collected and historicized – it was fast becoming archaic. We see a ‘freezing’ of the folk in Champfleury, who wrote on folk art, in addition to penning one of the first serious appreciations of Courbet’s painting. Schapiro argued that Champfleury was more eloquent and trenchant in his early writing on the folk and the ‘popular’, in contrast to his later writing, which became more doctrinaire, and coincided with his growing political conservatism. Realism (at least its main current) became the depiction of a ‘static peasantry and primitive cultures’ by the 1850s. Courbet’s stiff figures allude to the growing historicization of the French peasantry, an archaization of identity that had a particular trajectory and politics. The peasantry became non-coeval or out of sync with a rapidly industrializing France. In the wake of the 1848 revolution, Courbet depicted his peasants as ironic monuments, in order to understand their particular condition in a manifold place and time.

T. J. Clark inserted Courbet’s paintings into the wider landscape of political struggle from the 1840s to 1870s, moving from Ornans to Paris, and back again. For Clark, the core instabilities in each of Courbet’s key paintings hinged on the fundamental question of class. Class ironically mattered most when an artist was most unsure of it. There was a riskiness to realism, which he found in the contingent encounter between the historical viewer and a work of art. Clark’s ‘contingency’ can be understood in terms of contemporaneity. There are many instances in Image of the People where Clark...
discerns different times, or when the artist is out of time: when he writes, for instance, that Courbet was ‘in Paris but not of it’ (31); when, instead of the certainty of political action, the artist was ‘thrown’ into the events of 1848, unprepared (49); or when he detects the first real attempts at ambiguity in Courbet’s early works (think of two temporalities held in tandem, unresolved). One could say that Courbet’s aim was to be contemporaneous with the rural peasantry, rather than to know or be one of them. The way Clark settles on an ‘open’ interpretation of a painting almost admits to the presence of these heterogeneous temporalities:

“It was precisely its lack of open, declared significance which offended most of all; it was the way the Burial seemed to hide its attitudes, seemed to contain within itself too many contraries – religious and secular, comic and tragic, sentimental and grotesque. It was this inclusiveness, this exact and cruel deadpan, that made the Burial the focus of such different meanings’ (83).

To Clark’s argument, I would add that the balancing of the aesthetic and the political in Courbet’s early paintings derives from the way that they grasp heterogeneous temporalities. Ironically, their instability is the very source of their power.

For Michael Fried, Courbet’s painting was undergirded by an awareness of the artist’s own body, an experience so intense and singular that it ‘tended “naturally” to issue in images that can only be characterized as disunified, multi-scalar, technically disparate, and bizarrely oriented’. Fried argued that there was a ‘quasi-corporeal merger of painter-beholder into painting’ that was an ‘overarching and obsessive aim of Courbet’s practice’ (129). Fried essentially demolished our ingrained assumption that realism involved mimetic depiction, and forcefully shifted the interpretive ground of realism from epistemology to ontology. In his argument, contemporaneity may occur in the way that the body is sometimes not in but out of time, disjunct from it. It can be a way of describing our jagged cohabitation with other persons and things in the world. For example, in the Burial, Courbet was contemporaneous with the veterans of 1793, fellow Ornans townsfolk, members of his family, local religious authorities, the person being buried and, perhaps especially, by his careful placement in the painting, his friend and critic Max Buchon. Being contemporaneous, inhabiting a field of heterogeneous temporalities as a function of historicity, involved a fundamental embodiment.

In 1964, in a flash of insight, Sudjojono realized that Courbet’s predicament in 1849–50 was his own. That he called up the kneeling figure in Stonebreakers almost seems beside the point, when one realizes the deeper and more complex version of Courbet that emerged in the second and third paintings. No doubt there was the ever-present possibility that the temporal heterogeneity, momentarily captured in Sudjojono’s triptych, would fall apart, or become smoothened out, in time. One final way to hold onto such a tension is by reframing the triptych within mysticism. Mysticism may have been what allowed that very heterogeneity to come into being.

Revolutionary Mysticism

The dwelling-in-passivity that we saw in the third painting brings to mind the descent into the deeper recesses of the self found in Javanese Kebatinan mysticism. There was an expansion of mystical sects in Java in the early 1950s, and that mystical revival would have reignited what Sudjojono had learned in the Taman Siswa school in
Yogyakarta in the 1930s. Kebatinan mystics would undergo body-denying activities such as fasting, sexual abstinence, meditation, keeping awake through the night, sitting for hours at auspicious places, or retreating to mountains and caves. In so doing, these mystics sought to transcend the opposition between ‘inner’ (spirit) and ‘outer’ (body/world). Material reality became subsumed within a higher reality. The seated man in the third painting could be meditating, or engaging in ascetic practice (called ‘tapa’).

In this regard, the Indonesian word for a painting studio, ‘sanggar’, had a richer meaning for Sudjojono, as a form of meditation that specifically derived from Kebatinan mysticism. One can find other instances of mysticism in Sudjojono’s oeuvre: in his painting Frangipani Flower (Setangkai bunga kamboja; 1954; plate 14), lines of text are scrawled across a depiction of a Frangipani flower. The Javanese plant the Frangipani in cemeteries to ‘protect’ graves. More than a simple, melancholic still life, this painting acknowledges a more imbricated twinning of life and death.

In tracing a movement deep within the self or history, such mysticism also grasps a different kind of politics. Pheng Cheah has argued that Indonesian author and LEKRA member Pramoedya Ananta Toer (in his Buru Quartet, composed orally between 1969 and 1979, and published in 1981–88) sought to reactivate the spirit of the nation through fictional reconstructions of the decolonizing moment. In the Quartet, we experience our own nationalist awakening as we follow the exploits of a young Javanese man, Minke. Through him we feel the galvanizing of the people as a self-actualizing vital force, a process first theorized in Kant’s philosophy of transcendental freedom. Cheah draws on Pramoedya’s metaphor of a ghost, itself anterior to the opposition between life and death, to address what he calls ‘spectrality’ — a constitutive haunting that takes place before the oppositional struggle between the nation and the state. In the early 1960s, the nation — which had once brimmed with vital life, but was betrayed by governmental elites — returned to haunt the neocolonial state. Sudjojono’s triptych may have indeed been part of that haunting. Sombre reminders to Hanafi and Malik, who shortly after
1964 were about to cast their lot with a different political regime, the paintings were a concerted attempt to remember the revolution in and as loss. Mysticism, I would argue, served for Sudjojono as an internal self-consciousness of history. In the triptych, the progression from the first to the third painting can be said to be an internal, spiritual descent — a descent into passivity in order to renew the frail body of the Indonesian nation. The triptych ‘ends’ on a suspensive note in the third painting — only to begin again. Refusing synthesis or resolution, mysticism acknowledges heterogeneity. By dwelling in the moment between rest and revolutionary action, Sudjojono was unusually able to probe the aporia between revolutionary liberation and state capture. Only then could the soul be made visible, the promise of the nation kept alive.

In the ‘traditional’ Javanese past, a ruler assembled heirloom objects and extraordinary people around him at court, in order to concentrate and preserve Power, via a cosmological centring. Much like the traditional ruler, the modern mystic-viewer in front of the third painting goes ascetically inward, animating the objects around him, in order for the room to have a certain spiritual power. The seated man gathers his objects, his people, around him. The upright bamboo spear now doubles as ironized monument and totem. What would it mean to fold reality into dream? In a way, Sudjojono was not moving from ‘tradition’ to ‘modernity’. Rather, he was performing Tradition, searching for his ancestors, his community: finding Courbet in 1964.

Notes

1 The paintings are associated with Menteng 31, a place in Jakarta conceived as a training ground to overthrow the colonial forces, with sponsorship from the Japanese. Among the nationalist leaders who taught there were Sukarno, Hatta, and Amir Sjarifuddin. After Japanese involvement ceased in 1943, Menteng 31 continued to be a meeting place for activists, including Sudjojono, Hanafi, and Malik, and was associated with the communist party.

2 Even though they share common subject matter, there is no indication that Sudjojono intended these paintings as a unified group. Moting was published in Hanafi’s memoirs of 1996, and the three paintings were reproduced in Seabad S. Sudjojono 1913–2013, Santy Saptari, ed., Jakarta, 2013. Two other paintings by Sudjojono that are formally resemblant, but that I ultimately consider peripheral to the triptych, are: Kami Present, 1968, oil on canvas, Collection of National Gallery Singapore; Siro, 1965, oil on canvas, Collection of National Gallery Singapore; Siro, 1965, oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts and Ceramics, Jakarta, Indonesia.


5 My argument relies on the assumption that contemporaneous time, in contrast to linear time, may admit to effects of the unconscious — in all its contingency. For Freud and time, see Joel Pearl, A Question of Time: Freud in the Light of Heidegger’s Temporality, trans. Amir Atsmon and Joel Pearl, Amsterdam, 2013.

6 Alexander Nagel and Christopher S Wood, Anachronic Renaissance, New York, 2010. For me, their notion of the ‘anachronic’ shares the same temporal structure as Terry Smith’s ‘contemporaneity’. In Nagel and Wood’s more considered argument, however, the anachronic artifact ‘moves freely in time, but unlike the anachronistic artifact, it does not depend for its effect on a stable conception of the historicity of form’ (14). Nagel and Wood suggest that linear time is an effect of the material heterogeneity of artifacts (9). To me, Nagel and Wood’s argument suggests that nineteenth-century realism is merely one moment in a longer evolution of contemporaneity. Nepotism acknowledges heterogeneity. By dwelling in the moment between rest and revolutionary action, Sudjojono was unusually able to probe the aporia between revolutionary liberation and state capture. Only then could the soul be made visible, the promise of the nation kept alive.

7 Alex Potts, Experiments in Modern Realism: World-Making, Politics and the Everyday in Postwar European and American Art, New Haven, CT, 2013, 24. ’Central to more polemically self-aware forms of realism from the very outset was an anti-art aspiration to do away with the separation between art and life created by conventional artistic forms, including those that had become accepted as offering a naturalistically correct and artistically valid depiction of the world. Realist artists such as Courbet wanted to break out of the self-referential world of picturing in which the art of their times [seemed] to be trapped and create pictures that gave a more immediate and vital sense of reality.’ (24)

8 For the tension between world-referring and world-creating functions in art, see Stephen Halliwell, The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Antinomies, trans. Amir Atsmon and Joel Pearl, Amsterdam, 2013.

9 Elisabetta Pisanii, Indonesia, etc.: Exploring the Improbable Nation, London, 2014, 68.

11 Rather than dissolve realism into a generalized treatment of ‘contemporaneity’, the task, as I see it, is to have ‘contemporaneity’ take into account the aesthetic and historical complexities of realism.

12 Sudjojono’s artistic training began in the Arjuna school (part of the Theosophical Society) in Batavia from 1925 to 1928, in 1928 he studied with the Indonesian painter Piirgud, and moved to Lembang to take up a teacher’s training course at the Gumeng Sari School. He later went to the Taman Guru, a teacher’s training institute of the Taman Siswa movement. Sudjojono founded a school in the East Javaen village of Rogojampi in 1932. Sometime in the 1930s, he took lessons from the Japanese painter Chiyoyo Yazaki, who had lived in Paris for ten years. In 1936, Sudjojono started the school Poelasara in Sunter (Batavia), for poor neighbourhood children. He also taught at the Ksatrian School, a centre for nationalistic thought and culture. (Helena Spanjaard, Modern Indonesian Painting, London, 2003, 55–7) Sudjojono also learned from the exhibitions of modern Western art organized by the Dutch industrialist P. A. Regnault, at the Bond van Kunstkringen in Batavia, and also in Surabaya, that included original paintings by Gauguin, Utrillo, Chagall, and Van Dongen, and lithographs by Daumier, Corot, Gavarni, Millet, Pissarro, Toulouse-Lautrec, Derain, Rouault, Kandinsky, Picasso, Toorop, and others. Although ‘natives’ were not given access to these exhibitions, Sudjojono’s father-in-law may have snuck him into the one in Batavia.


15 ‘Persagi’ stands for Perserikatan Ahli-Ahli Gambar Indonesia (Union of Indonesian Visual Artists). It was founded at the Ksatrian school in Batavia, where Sudjojono taught. The association lasted from 1938 to 1943, and had about twenty members. See Holt, Art in Indonesia, 197; Spanjaard, Modern Indonesian Painting, 51–5.

16 The painting was exhibited in the seminal May 1941 group exhibition at the Bataviaische Kunstkring – the first exhibition to consist solely of Indonesian nationalist modernist painters – and was already mentioned in the Batasuisse Newsworld. Spanjaard, Modern Indonesian Painting, 59.

17 Basuki Abdullah’s style was informed by his class background. He was the son of the landscape painter Abdullah Suriosubroto, and was raised by an uncle who was the physician to the king of Solo. He spent six years in Europe before the Second World War and attended the prestigious Royal Academy (Koninklijke Akademie) in The Hague. In Indonesia, he was one of the few Indonesians who exhibited in the prestigious Royal Academy of Fine Arts. Anak Marhaen Hanafi (1918–2004) served as Minister of Youth Affairs. Anak Marhaen Hanafi (1918–2004) served as Minister of Labour of the People (1957–60), and Indonesian Ambassador to Cuba (1963–65). His proximity to Sukarno allowed him to ask for political asylum in France, where he lived until his death.

18 Holt, Art in Indonesia, 197. The ‘now’ in her sentence seems to loosely refer to the 1950s–1960s, when she was doing research for and writing her book.

19 The battle within Indonesia was set within a wider international frame: for a long time, the United States sided with the Dutch, with Marshall Plan monies in fact funding the Dutch colonial operation; only towards 1948–49 did it become politically necessary for the United States to support the Republican forces.

20 Chaerul Saleh (1916–67) became a government minister during Sukarno’s presidency, and was a close confidant of Sukarno. Wikana (1914–66) was an independent leader and later Minister of Youth Affairs. Anak Marhaen Hanafi (1918–2004) served as Minister of Labour of the People (1957–60), and Indonesian Ambassador to Cuba (1963–65). His proximity to Sukarno allowed him to ask for political asylum in France, where he lived until his death.

21 Ammudin F. T. Siregar, in Soehb T. Sudjojono 1913–2013, 11. ‘I am indebted to Siregar’s discussion of the three paintings. See also his important book Sung Ahli Gambar: Sketsa, Gambar dan Pemikiran S. Sudjojono, Jakarta, 2010, which significantly contributes to the historiography on Sudjojono by its wealth of sources and more critical analysis of the art. For his understanding of Sudjojono’s realism, Siregar drew from Sanento Yuluwah, Gereja de la peinture indonésienne contemporaine: Le rôle de S. Sudjojono, this three-time cycle, Paris, 1981.

22 The first painting is in some ways the least interesting, because it literally refers to that Tjikampek meeting in November 1945.


24 Note how the centre man’s feet are clumsily depicted, and a bit proportionally incorrect. Compare Michael Fried’s remark in Courbet’s Realism (Chicago, IL, 1990), where he notes that the bottom of the picture is, for Courbet, ‘a zone of special sensibility’ (132).

25 Mia Bustam, Sudjojono dan Aku, Jakarta, 2006, chapter 4. (The book is an autobiographical account of her years with Sudjojono.)


27 The most incisive analysis of time in Baudelaire was provided by Walter Benjamin; see Michael William Jennings, ‘On the banks of the new Lethe: Commodification and experience in Benjamin’s Baudelaire Book’, Boundary 2, 30: 1, Spring 2003, 89–104.

28 There was likely a change in their relationship around 1950, when, as Bustam recounts, she de-deified and began to treat her husband as an ordinary person (Bustam, Sudjojono dan Aku, 231). At the time, the painting may have been wholly mundane: Bustam notes a sculptural bust of her done sometime around 1948, when Sudjojono was learning to carve in stone (127).

29 Sudjojono once said: ‘Why did I turn to Realism? For me, Realism is an ordinary person (Bustam, Sudjojono dan Aku, 231). At the time, the painting may have been wholly mundane: Bustam notes a sculptural bust of her done sometime around 1948, when Sudjojono was learning to carve in stone (127).

30 Point made by Antarkrisa. Conversation with the author, 19 December 2014. For the most comprehensive account of LEKRA’s debates in the visual arts thus far, see Antarkrisa, Tunan Tunan Kewin Muda: Hubungan Smi Rupa LEKRA 1950–1965, Yogyakarta, 2005. On the post-1959 decline of LEKRA, see also Foulcher, Social Commitment, 105–42.

31 LEKRA’s programme was influenced by Soviet and Chinese models of socialist realism. Artists associated with LEKRA included Sudjojono, Affandi, Suromo, Hendra Gunawan, Trubus, Basuki Besobobo, Marah Djibul, Dysko Pekik, Amirus Nataluya, Henk Ngunzang, and Batara Lubis. National Conferences were held in 1957 and 1959. By 1963, LEKRA had around 100,000 members spread across 200 branches. Because of its communist leanings, LEKRA was banned after the military coup of 1965. For LEKRA, see especially Keith Foulcher, Social Commitment in Literature and the Arts: The Indonesian Institute of Peoples Culture 1950–1965, Clayton, Victoria, 1986. See also the recent issue of the magazine Tempo devoted to LEKRA: Jehat dan Geger 1965, Jakarta, 2014.

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Courbet after Sudjojono

the bottom of society, and thereby close the gap between the middle and lower classes. But the movement involved a re-collectivization, and could not foresee its own instrumentalization.


37 Note that LEKRA was wiped out with the country-wide purge of communists in 1965.

38 From 1958, Sudjojono's involvement in LEKRA had been downgraded. The PKI regarded as unacceptable his decision to take a second, younger wife. Holt, Art in Indonesia, 329.

39 The artists Hendra Gunawan and Dullah also returned to the Revolution in the late 1950s: for example, Gunawan's Guerrilla Fighters, 1955, oil on canvas, 135 × 197 cm. On artists returning to the revolution, see also Vickers, A History of Modern Indonesia, 121.

40 In the early 1960s, Adam Malik began pulling away from President Sukarno, whose autocratic rule distressed many Indonesian officials. Malik threw in his hand with General Suharto, who became President after the failure of a purported Communist coup in 1965. Suharto made Malik part of a ruling triumvirate with himself and the Sultan of Yogyakarta. The next year Malik was named Foreign Minister. See Ruth McVey, In memoriam: Adam Malik (1917–1984), Indonesia, 39, April 1985, 144–8; A. M. Hanafi, In memoriam: Adam Malik (1917–1984), Indonesia, 39, April 1985, 149–57.

41 The painting served as a memorialization of the revolution for a fellow comrade. On the upper right-hand corner of the painting is written: 'Bung [Brother] Adam [i.e. Adam Malik], this is my affection for the Revolution'. Siregar rightfully points out that this painting does not concern itself with mere documentation: 'Sudjojono's revolutionary paintings transcend the sort of historical facts we often see in photographic documents that often immortalize events one-dimensionally.' (Seabad S. Sudjojono 1913–2013, 127.)

42 For 'absorption', see Michael Fried, Absorption and Reactricity: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot, Berkeley, CA, 1980. For a compelling treatment of the Friedian absorption-theatricality dialectic in terms of temporality, see Marini Young, Realism in the Age of Impressionism: Painting and the Politics of Time, New Haven, CT, 2013. Young's opposition between instantaneity and duration roughly maps onto my opposition between linear-chronological and contemporaneous time. Duration allows for contemporaneity to occur, including the breaking through of unconscious temporalities onto the 'surface' of linear time.

43 Siregar has noted the painting's ambiguity: 'As with Pettimun di Tjunkemp, we are once again invited into an ambiguous atmospheric space – we are unsure of the time of day, [is thin] late afternoon or early in the morning?' (Seabad S. Sudjojono 1913–2013, 127.)

44 Notice how the relative brightness of the space in the window (relative to what's outside or around it) makes it pull toward us, when it should be receding.

45 This dream/reality structure dates at least from the European Renaissance. See, for instance, Stuart Clark, Vents of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture, Oxford and New York, 2007. But, as I will suggest, there is also an Indonesian source for this idea.

46 Feith, The Decline of Constitutional Democracy, 41.


49 For a psychoanalytic understanding of 'ruin', see Leo Bersani, The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art, New York, 1986.


51 'Bersiap' is crucially mentioned in Bustam, Sudjojono dan Aku, 84, in relation to the confusion of the people with regard to freedom.

52 I am here drawing upon Michael Fried’s remarkable account of how Courbet obsessively attempted to project himself into his paintings. See Fried, Courbet’s Realism, especially 53–88.

53 To be fair, he seems to be looking at the wall slightly to the left of the window.

54 Sudjojono very likely saw a copy of Curt Glaser’s article on Courbet, ‘Die Pariser Courbet-Ausstellung’, in Kunst und Künstler: Illustrierte Monatschrift für Bildkunde Kunst, redaktion Karl Scheffler, Jahrgang XXVIII, Berlin, 1930, 7–16, which reproduces the Marcel Trampadoux painting on page 10. That Courbet avoids a more conventional and public portrait of the critic, in favour of a more contemplative, personal scene, fits the mood of Sudjojono’s second and especially third painting.

55 For Courbet and gender, see Fried, Courbet’s Realism, chapter 6.


57 Sukarno refers to the Masyarakat empire in Soekarno, Sukarno: An Autobiography, as Told to Cindy Adams, Indianapolis, IN, 1965, 179.

58 There was a shift to the Chinese model of socialist realism towards the late 1950s, as it was supported by a strong state. (Henk Schulte Nordholt, ‘Indonesia in the 1950s: Nation, modernity, and the post-colonial state’, Bijdragen tot Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, 167: 4, 2011, 395.)

59 For the breadth of realism in France, see Gabriel Weisberg, The Realist Tradition: French Painting and Drawing, 1830–1900, Cleveland, OH and Bloomington, IN, 1980.

60 For the historiography of realism in Europe, see the essays in Gabriel P. Weisberg, ed., The European Realist Tradition, Bloomington, IN, 1982; Sarah Faunce, ‘Reconsidering Courbet’, in Sarah Faunce and Linda Nochlin, eds, Courbet Rethéoriséé, Brooklyn, NY and New Haven, CT, 1988, 1–16.

61 There have been attempts to understand socialist realism in all its difficult complexity, and pull it away from its traditional interpretation as a deterministic and ideological art. See, for instance, Thomas Lalhusen and Evgeny Dobrenko, eds, Socialist Realism without Shores, Durham, NC, 1997; Christina Kaier, ‘Was socialist realism forced labor? The case of Aleksandr Deineka’, Oxford Art Journal, 28: 3, 2005, 321–45.


63 While Sudjojono used the Dutch word 'mellet' to refer to reality, what is real or existent for the Javanese, as Amir Sidiharga has pointed out, is only partially captured by the Javanese word 'nyata'. Amir Sidiharga, ‘S. Sudjojono: The artist, realist and truth’, in Strategies Towards the Real: S. Sudjojono and Contemporary Indonesian Art, Singapore, 2008, 42.

64 David Summers, in Real Space: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism (London, 2003), has, in my estimation, carried out the strongest decentering of Western modernism within world art and artifactual history thus far. A key component is his folding of linear perspective into prior developments in vision theory, including the optics of Alhazen (965–1040). For him, world art history consists of a series of recursions of ‘planarity’ and ‘virtuality’.


66 According to Antariksa, based on several intersecting lines of evidence, Sudjojono met with the Indonesian dissident and revolutionary Tan Malaka, then in Singapore. Conversation with the author, 19 December 2014.

67 Foucault, Social Commitment, 206. He notes that the tradition of German Marxist aesthetic thought that included Lukács, Brecht, Adorno and Benjamin ‘appears to have been unknown in LEKRA’ (207).

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70 For an excellent recent treatment of the problem of primitivism within modernism, see Paul Wood, Western Art and the Wider World, Hoboken, NJ, 2013, 152–74.


72 Schapiro, ‘Courbet and popular imagery’, 190.

73 For ‘non-coeval’ within a global context, see Johannes Fabian, Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object, New York, 2002.


76 E.g.: ‘The critics in 1851 were affected by Courbet’s work precisely because they could not answer these questions and get their bearings for aesthetic judgment’ (Clark, Image of the People, 79).

77 Clark’s writing was at the front edge of a long wave of non-teleological Marxism that was reshaping Euro-American art history in the 1970s and 1980s. Jason Gaiger, ‘Hegel’s contested legacy: Rethinking the relation between art history and philosophy’, The Art Bulletin, 93: 2, June 2011, 184.

78 On the charcoal Man with Pipe (Clark’s figure 18), he writes: ‘It’s the first time Courbet is equivocal about himself, which in this case is a sign of progress’ (45). Clark made apparent that, in realisms such as Courbet’s, ambiguity was commensurate with historicity.

79 Fried, Courbet’s Realism, 73.

80 Going further with regard to the heterogeneous temporalities in Courbet’s Burial at Ornans: the upcoming election of 1852, the slow flow of the Loue river in the valley below the burial, the slow movement of the cortege, the bumping of the altar boy, and so on. (I thank Marnin Young for pointing this out to me.)

81 Fried, Courbet’s Realism, 129. Cf. also ‘copresence of mutually disparate scales’ (134).


85 ‘Tapa is, then, a kind of suspended animation, a continuing mystical experience’ (Geertz, The Religion of Java, 326).

86 Sudjojono explicitly points this out in an interview in the 1980s. Siregar, Sang Ahli Gambar, 26.

87 ‘Karboba, / Kami tumuh bagus semerbak, / Di tanam di rumah orang. / Di taman, di pulau Bali, / Di kuburan di tempat mati.’ (‘Frangipani, / You grow so well, fragrantly / Planted in people’s homes / By the candi, in Bali / As the graves, with the dead’) Quoted in Sebald S. Sudjojono 1913–2013, 108.


89 Clough argues on 261–2 that Pramoedya did not have a simple, transcendental understanding of mysticism.

90 The phrase ‘jawa krik’ is often used to describe Sudjojono’s painting (e.g. Sutiharta, in Visible Soul). It is meant to capture the process of tapping into the soul, which allows truth to emerge.

91 The Javanese understood, and understand, sovereignty in terms of a more charismatic or spiritual conception of power, one based on centring and the accumulation of power. See Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, ‘The idea of power in Javanese culture’, 17–77. (Jeffrey Hadler points out to me that, at the time of the writing of this essay, Anderson may have been a bit overly enamoured by Sukarno’s early rulership and power. Anderson himself acknowledged this later in his career.)

92 For ‘performing Tradition’, see Anderson, ‘A time of darkness and a time of light’, in Language and Power, 241–70. In this essay, Anderson argues that Dr Soetomo’s autobiography, rather than using a conventional, Western chronology suitable for biography, unusually deployed a non-linear temporality: ‘It looks very much, too, as if Soetomo is embarking on the construction of an idea of a tradition. For what, in the end, is a Tradition, so understood, but a way of making connections in separation, of acknowledging by not repeating? The distinction between men da hulu and men sekaru, then, is probably less one of historical epochs than of altered states of consciousness.’ (253)