

ARAHMAIANI



FERTILITY OF THE MIND

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FOREWORD

TYLER ROLLINS

Arahmaiani is one of Indonesia's most respected and iconic contemporary artists, and her work is internationally recognized for its powerful and provocative commentaries on social and cultural issues. In the 1980s and '90s, she established herself as a pioneer in the field of performance art in Southeast Asia, although her practice also incorporates a wide variety of media, including video, installation, painting, drawing, and sculpture. Since her first exhibition in 1980, her work has been included in over one hundred solo and group exhibitions around the world. Tyler Rollins Fine Art is pleased to present *Fertility of the Mind*, Arahmaiani's first solo exhibition in the United States, taking place at our New York gallery from January 9 – February 22, 2014.

The exhibition features the first survey of the artist's thirty years of performance work, curated by Leeza Ahmady, independent curator and director of Asian Contemporary Art Week, New York. As she explains in her curatorial statement, Ahmady has selected nineteen performances from Arahmaiani's vast body of work, creating a tapestry-like installation of almost one hundred photographs that document these works, supplemented with associated objects. The exhibition also includes selected paintings, her seminal 2004 video, *I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Legend*, and three key installations from the 1990s. These installations have not been "recreated" precisely but have been modified to reflect the artist's evolving practice. Of particular note is a new iteration of *Etalase*, a 1993 installation in a glass and wood display cabinet that was exhibited in the landmark 1996 exhibition, *Traditions/Tensions*, at Asia Society in New York City, as well as the acclaimed group exhibition, *Global Feminisms*, at the Brooklyn Museum in 2007.

Since the 1980s, Arahmaiani's work has been exhibited widely in museums and biennials throughout the world, from Asia to the Americas, Australia, and Europe, including: the Venice Biennale (2003); Biennale of the Moving Image, Geneva (2003); Gwangju Biennale (2002); Bienal de São Paulo (2002), Performance Biennale, Israel (2001); Biennale de Lyon (2000); Werkleitz Biennale (2000); Bienal de la Habana (1997); Asia-Pacific Triennial, Brisbane, Australia (1996); and the Yogya Biennial (1994). Her work is currently featured in the group exhibition, *Suspended Histories*, at the Museum Van Loon in Amsterdam, the Netherlands (through January 23, 2014). Recent group exhibitions include *Women in Between: Asian Women Artists 1984-2012* at the Mie Prefectural Art Museum in Japan (2013), as well as museum exhibitions in Singapore and Australia. Over the past few years a particular focus of her work has been on environmental issues in the Tibetan plateau region, where she has been actively collaborating with local monks and villagers to foster a greater environmental consciousness. In 2013, she developed a new performance work related to this project, entitled *Memory of Nature*, which incorporates Tibetan cultural influences with her characteristic flag ceremonies.

ARAHMAIANI: FERTILITY OF THE MIND

LEEZA AHMADY

In late October, I shared my exciting news with Tyler Rollins that, after opening a show in Taipei, I would be stopping by Indonesia. I had received an invitation to speak at an event I'd been watching for some years – the Jogja Biennale. The 2013 edition, entitled *EQUATOR #2: Indonesia Encounters the Arab Region*, would give me the opportunity to soak up an art scene that's been developing since the seventies, if not earlier. Tyler immediately suggested that if history is what I am interested in, I must meet Arahmaiani.

Over the past decade, beginning with Central Asia, I have been making my way further and further west, east, and south, in an effort to decipher artists from all regions of Asia from a larger, continental, and therefore worldly perspective. My aim has been to study the parallel experiences of artists as well as their art works as crucial documents for uncovering buried histories that are continuously overlooked by today's fast-paced, campaign oriented, global information-age; a time when the principal disease afflicting humanity is information itself, an imposter posing as knowledge and wisdom in our minds.

Indonesia is the third largest-populated country in Asia with a very diverse cultural and religious background, so my intention was to take in as much as I could during a short six-day trip to the city of Yogyakarta. Also known as Jogja, it is renowned as center of classical Javanese fine art and culture such as ballet, drama, music, poetry, puppetry, and batik. It was therefore a great relief that within an hour of our meeting, I realized a remarkable way to consider Indonesia, its history, and its relationship to the world would be to study the life, art, and significant person of Arahmaiani Feisal herself.

Great performance art brilliantly ties together formal and conceptual artistic disciplines and has been embraced by some of the most prolific artists in the world for over five decades. It is rooted in one inherent medium: the body, and two quintessential concepts: observation and participation. As a live act, it generally takes place in public spaces, yielding to direct dialogues between the artist and the public, as well as amongst audiences present and beyond. Provocative by nature, performance art is conceived for the purpose of sharing, experiencing, and processing particular mechanisms. It is an inclusive practice, inherently tied to creating awareness and inciting change in oneself and within society.

For this survey of Arahmaiani's performance work, I selected approximately one hundred photographic images documenting nineteen different performances over a period of three decades, which map the evolving meditations of an artist whose prolific life of activism and artistic practice have been steadfast in inquiry. Arahmaiani is generally recognized as a great provocateur of social and political issues, and her works in essence foreground a long and enduring personal and spiritual journey. A process whereby nothing is spared and all is equally scrutinized, particularly notions of belief, history, and the self. With Socratic persistence and an experimental approach to conceptual art, Arahmaiani has been staging her diverse tapestry of spiritual and psychological insights to create consciousness about some of today's most urgent problems worldwide. In doing so, she becomes a formal and conceptual medium for communication, connectivity, and cooperation between individuals, collectives, communities, and nations.

Arahmaiani's performances constitute an array of social initiatives, interventions, and alignments that render whole that, which is hidden or otherwise fragmentary. Advocating a re-thinking of art, history and philosophy altogether, these performances articulate the artist's ongoing exposé of mechanistic thought, beliefs, actions, and policies that plague individuals, countries, regions, and humanity at large; manifested in her peaceful, beautiful, and deeply symbolic protests, marches, ceremonies, and written texts that instigate individual and collective vigilance against all ignorance, injustice, and mental manipulation by agencies of power worldwide.

Born and raised in Afghanistan, and based in New York, Leeza Ahmady is an independent art curator and educator, noted for her foundational research and curatorial work concerning contemporary art practices in Central Asia. She has presented significant artists of the region in international art forums such as dOCUMENTA (13), the Venice Biennale, Istanbul Biennial, and Asia Art Archive, Hong Kong. Since 2005, in her role as director of Asian Contemporary Art Week, Ahmady brings together leading New York City museums and galleries in a citywide biennial comprising of exhibitions, lectures, screenings, and symposia to contextualize the works of artists living and working in various regions of Asia, including the Middle East.



VIEW OF THE EXHIBITION AT TYLER ROLLINS FINE ART



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DO NOT PREVENT THE FERTILITY OF THE MIND

1997-2014

feminine napkins, fluorescent lights, wooden stool, glass vial, blood and photograph

108 x 144 x 22 in. (274 x 366 x 56 cm)

Originally exhibited in 1997 at Concrete House, Bangkok, Thailand. Original materials: feminine napkins, neon lights, wooden stool, glass vial, blood, and photograph. Each iteration incorporates slight changes to the installation, marking shifts in the artist's thought process about the work. In the current iteration, all materials remain the same except for a new version of the photograph, which now depicts the artist wearing a red shirt instead of the original black one. She is holding the same items in her hands: surgical scissors and an IUD wire, which is now red instead of white. The "blood" in the current iteration is an artificial substitute.



ETALASE

1993-2014

glass and wood vitrine and found objects

42 ½ x 71 x 28 in. (108 x 457 x 71 cm)

Originally exhibited in 1993 as part of *Sex, Religion, Coca-Cola* at Oncor Studio, Jakarta, Indonesia. Reconceived in 1996 for *Traditions/Tensions* at Asia Society, New York, and in 2007 for *Global Feminisms* at the Brooklyn Museum. Original materials: glass and wooden vitrine, Buddha statue, drum, Pat Kua mirror, the Holy Quran (gold colored cover), slide box (with soil), metal and plastic fan (also used in Chinese martial arts as a weapon), Coca-Cola bottle, and photograph. In the current iteration, the Buddha has been replaced with Tara (the feminine Buddha), the Pat Kua mirror is smaller and more practical, and the color of the cover of the Holy Quran has changed from gold to green. The soil box is now made of wood, and the fan is transformed to natural materials of wood and paper. The photograph inside the display case documents another performance by the artist, *Handle without Care*.



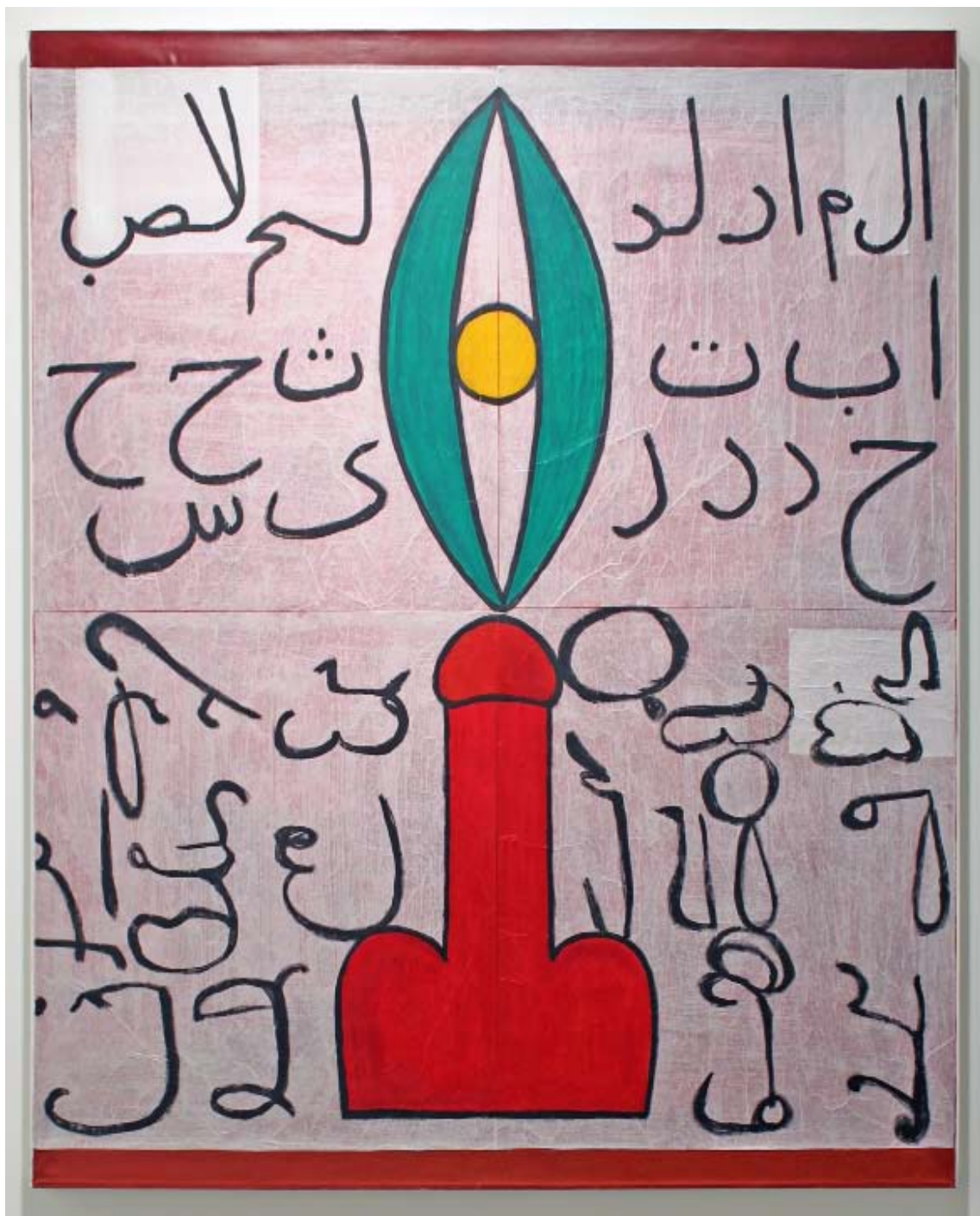
SACRED COKE

1993- 2014

wooden table, organic rice, soil, Coca-Cola bottle and condom

40 ½ x 41 x 41 in. (102.5 x 104 x 104 cm)

Originally exhibited in 1993 at Oncor Studio, Jakarta, Indonesia. Reconceived in 1995 for *Contemporary Art from Non-Aligned Countries* at the National Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia, and in 1997 for *Cosmology of Mutilation*, the 6th Havana Biennial, Cuba. Original materials: wooden table, salt, baking powder, soil, Coke bottle, and condom. In the current iteration, the salt and baking powder are replaced with organic basmati rice; all other materials remain unaltered.



LINGGA-YONI

2013

acrylic and rice paper on canvas

55 x 47 in. (140 x 120 cm)



JAWI

2013

acrylic on canvas

55 x 47 in. (140 x 120 cm)



CONFLUENCE I

2010

acrylic on canvas

55 x 94 in. (120 x 240 cm)



هل توجد امكانية أخرى لكي لا يجب أن أحمل كلَ محمولة المشكوكات
Is there another possibility for me so that I don't need to
bear the entire burden of a person who must be under
suspicion,

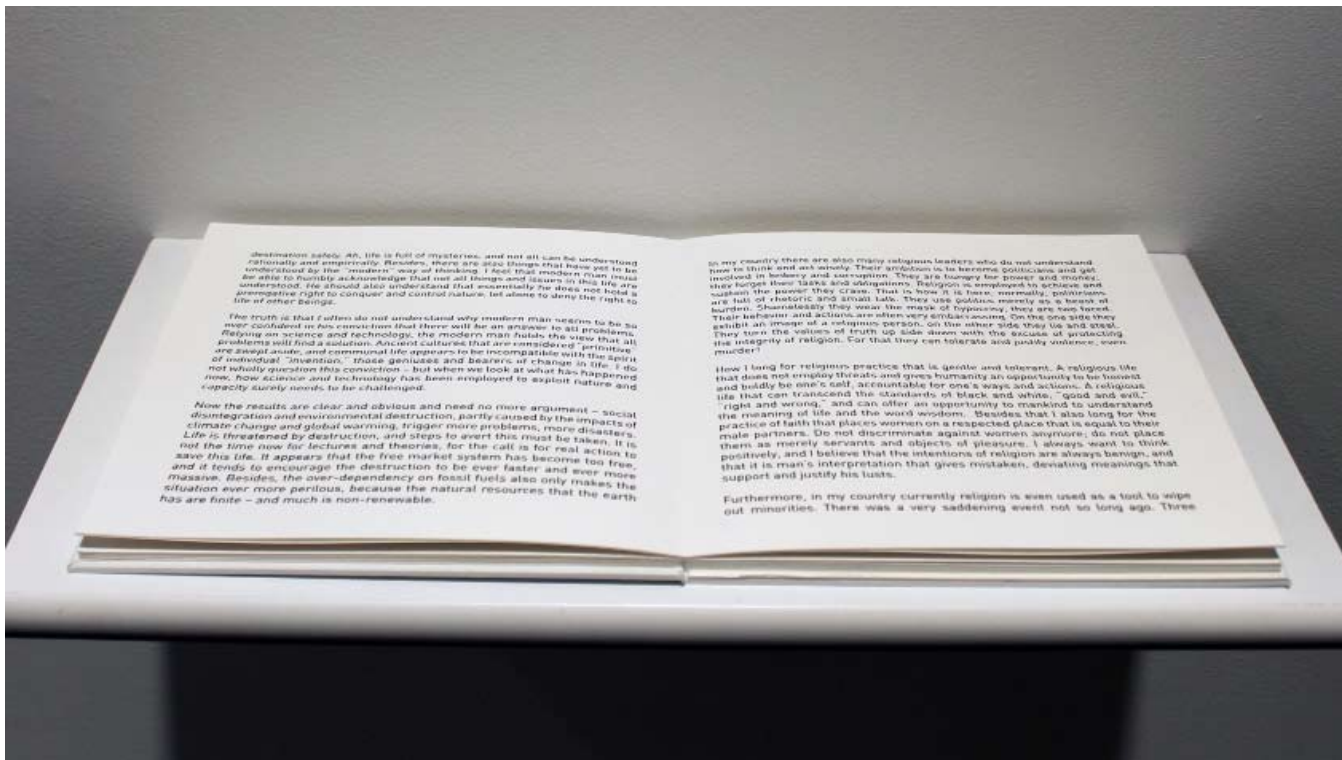
I DON'T WANT TO BE PART OF YOUR LEGEND

2004

single channel video

11:34 min.

edition of 5



REFLECTIONS OF A NOMAD DREAMER

2012

handmade book

7 x 7 x ¾ in. (18 x 18 x 2 cm)



***Accident*, 1980**

Bandung, Indonesia

In one of her earliest works, concerned by the alarming rise in accidents along the main road in Bandung, Arahmaiani wrapped the lampposts in the main street of the city with blood stained bandages. She stopped traffic and engaged passengers in conversation, distributing flyers that detailed the number and types of rising accidents in that road. As an art student, she became the first in her group to undertake public performance art, but it caused her suspension from the university and exclusion from further exhibitions. *Accident* is significant also in that it incorporated social and political activism as an inherent aspect of art making for Arahmaiani.

Art must not be separated from life and become mere decoration. Art must be able to encourage a new awareness of humanity and a new social consciousness. — Arahmaiani

Leeza Ahmady, *Arahmaiani: Fertility of the Mind*, Curatorial Statement 2014.



***Newspaperman*, 1981**

Bandung, Indonesia

An early performance in collaboration with fellow students from the Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, Bandung Institute of Technology, at a time when art students experimented with marginal, often provocative art-happenings and events. *Newspaperman* embodies Arahmaiani's early experimentation with local and international artistic movements, namely, the late 1960s Fluxus and Indonesia's New Art Movement of the 1970s. As a member of Kelompok Jeprut, she frequently organized and took part in street events and performances at shopping malls and other public spaces. *Newspaperman* was a work in reaction to the constrained freedom of expression during the New Order era in Indonesia.

The definition of art must be expanded – as wide as it possibly can be! — Arahmaiani

Leeza Ahmady. *Arahmaiani: Fertility of the Mind*, Curatorial Statement 2014.



The Flower, 1982
Yogyakarta, Indonesia

The artist had a stone platform constructed below ground level, suggestive of the bases of ancient Hindu and Buddhist temples occasionally unearthed in Yogyakarta, where she silently meditated for some time. The performance evoked Java's Hindu-Buddhist-Animist spiritual traditions and their continued legacy.

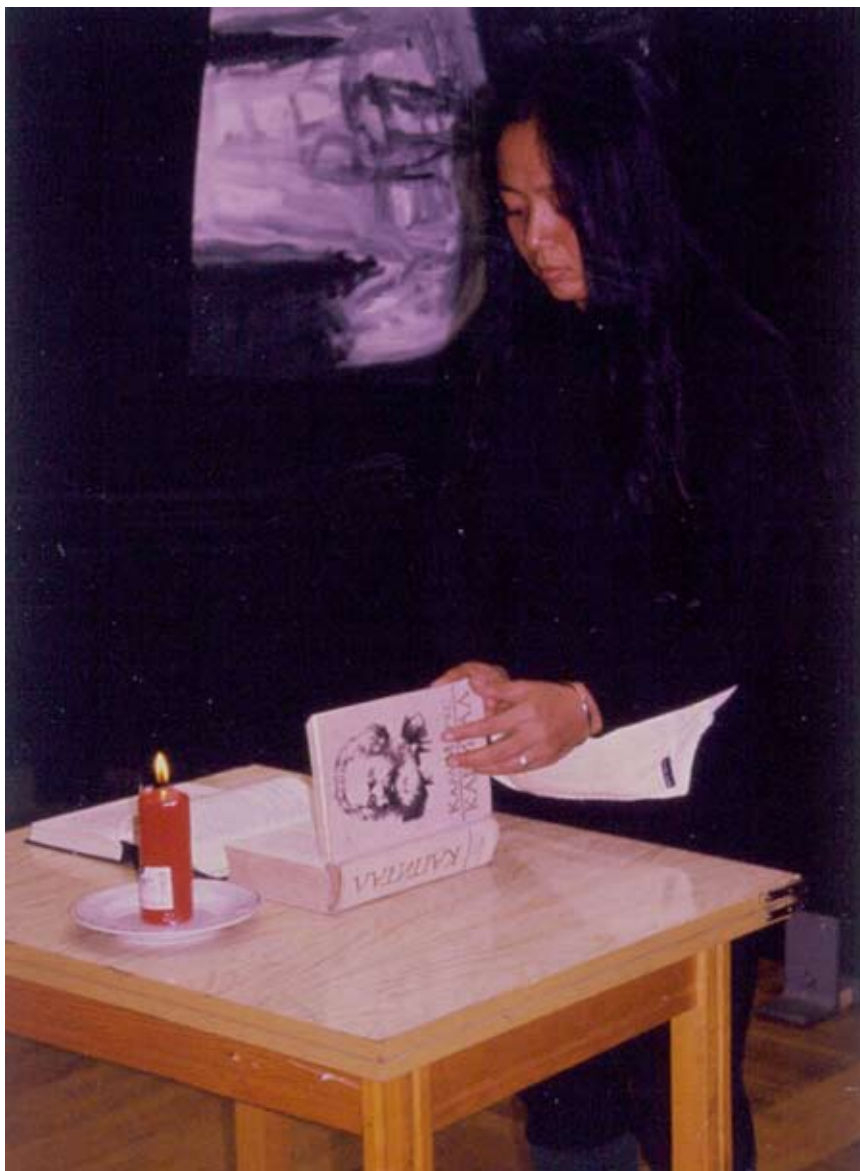


***Offering from A-Z*, 1996**

Padaeng Crematorium, Chiang Mai, Thailand

Offerings from A-Z is made up of a series of performances taking place at a Buddhist temple in Chiangmai, Thailand, questioning the growing problem of prostitution in Asia. The artist, lying on an actual site used to cremate bodies, also distributed pages from pornographic magazines to audiences. These pages were set on fire as a type of ritual offering, thus establishing an unsettling connection between religious beliefs and the profane, between tradition and social realities. In another piece, Arahmaiani covered herself with white sheets stained with blood. Lining both sides, there were offering plates and two rows of weapons. The blood representing violence and, at the same time, a metaphor for the duality that women in Asia face: praised and respected for their fertility and, yet, discriminated against for their menstruation by being prohibited access to the temples and holy sites.

"Offerings from A-Z, (2)," *Re.Act.Feminism - A Performing Archive*. Online Resource.



Burning Bodies, Burning Countries, 1998

Musée de Castieva, Almaty, Kazakhstan

The piece refers to a specific incident when four students were killed during a demonstration against the Suharto regime in May 1998. As a consequence there were riots and pillaging, mostly directed against the Indonesian Chinese population. Some 1,500 people were victims of a three-day-terror with hundreds of women raped.

Haupt & Binder, "Arahmaiani," *Nafas Art Magazine*, 2003.



***His-story*, 2000**

Premiered at Jakarta International Performance Art Festival; toured Germany & Japan 2003

This performance work is closely aligned to Michel Foucault's influential notion of the body as a corporeal object of surveillance. Arahmaiani, however, locates this theory within the context of her own wide-ranging personal experiences, emphasizing how the body "becomes a battlefield for political struggles and conflicts of interests."

Zening Wang, "New Trajectories: Arahmaiani in Yogyakarta," *C-Arts*, May/June 2008.



***Lapen Wedding*, 2004**

Kedai Kebun Forum, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Lapen, a cheap alcoholic drink, was served to guests in a mock wedding party with Arahmaiani as the bride and her male groom dressed in wedding costumes fashioned after the different flags of the twenty-six political parties running for election at the time in Indonesia. The wedding party, and drunkenness, are both metaphors for the grand imaging campaigns launched by politicians to hypnotize their constituent masses, producing an overwhelming sense of euphoria that leads to collective submission. Arahmaiani confronts the more detrimental aspect of such hysterical campaigns, whereby politicians themselves become drunks, hypnotized by the power of their own bluff at the expense of citizens. Similar to the way poor families often take on debilitating debts to put on elaborate weddings just to keep up with social appearance.

Art is a "tool" to examine and assess reality, and can be employed by anyone, anytime, and anywhere!
— Arahmaiani

Leeza Ahmady. *Arahmaiani: Fertility of the Mind*, Curatorial Statement 2014.

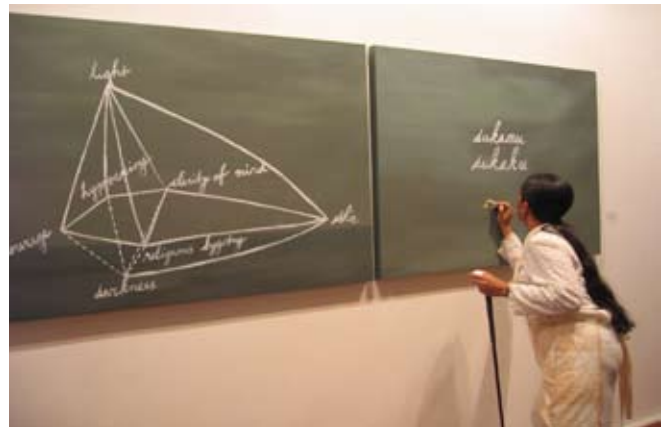


***Soho Baby*, 2004**

2nd Dadao Live Art Festival, Beijing, China

In *Soho Baby*, Arahmaiani invites the participation of local audiences — at a fundamental level replicating the (mis-)exchanges that take place between people of different races and nationalities in a globalized world. She begins by inscribing Jawi characters on herself, delineating the essential markers of religious and linguistic identity that successful navigation in a globalized world demands. By Arahmaiani's own account, some of the texts qualify only as scribbles; these are to be interpreted as a desire to complexify the clichés and stereotypes so often employed in attempts to bridge differences. Audience members then take turns writing words meaningful to them on parts of her body until it becomes a dense, living canvas, ridden with collective projections of societal values. Yet not one particular value is imbued or specifically absorbed; all of them are only skin-deep. The key question that emerges: are there universals underlying the diversity of appearances and values that we encounter in our daily lives?

Zening Wang, "New Trajectories: Arahmaiani in Yogyakarta," *C-Arts*, May/June 2008.



***Learning to Swing*, 2005**

Part of the artist's solo exhibition entitled *Lecture on Painting, Part I*, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Having recently experienced a great sense of appreciation for grayness in German landscapes, literally, and as a painterly discipline, Arahmaiani arrived in Malaysia's lush green environment, feeling as though she were swinging between two worlds. She staged a golf match inside the gallery to convey this feeling as a setting for her "lecture" on painting, in the form of a performance which incorporated a number of gray paintings onto which she rendered a series of terminologies connecting words to one another in a set of strange but alluring grids and geometric diagrams. *Learning to Swing* essentially is a commentary on the way art is marketed and sold. A deciphering of rhetoric that veils "market fundamentalism, exploitation, monopoly, and market terrorism." By translating the medium of painting into a performance work, the artist attempts to "transform the individual 'product' of painting for the commercial art world into a complex question of authorship and its marketability."

Leeza Ahmady, *Arahmaiani: Fertility of the Mind*, Curatorial Statement, 2014.



Flag / Bendera

Rostock, Germany, 2006; Borobudur, Central Java, and Merapi, Indonesia 2007; Nagano, Japan, and Sydney, Australia 2007; Shenzhen, China & Singapore 2008; Esplanade, Singapore 2009; and Kali Opak, Indonesia 2010

The *Flag/Bendera* project is a series of community-involved performances in which select locally significant phrases and words are inscribed on fabric, with either Arabic script or fonts used by multinational corporations. Quietly mimicking today's global obsession with brand-culture, the flags are then waved about in marches, celebrations, and other choreographed gatherings at various historical, contemporary, or environmentally significant public spaces. The series began with Arahmaiani designing just one flag with the Arabic-derived Indonesian word *akal*, which means "sense" or "cunning," and has evolved into multiple flags with various subtitles, including the iteration at Esplanade Theatres in Singapore, entitled: *I Love You – After Joseph Beuys Social Sculpture*, 2009.

This community based art project is a sustainable artwork that I designed with the intention and the goal of studying and developing collective creativity, because modern societies put more emphasis on individual creativity. I implement an "open art system" where the definition of art is expanded as wide as possible so that it might cover various things and have inter-disciplinary characteristics and be able to make breakthroughs within rigid discourses and established values. Besides implementing the principles of democratic dialogue, I also employ a critical approach whenever needed. — Arahmaiani

Leeza Ahmady, *Arahmaiani: Fertility of the Mind*, Curatorial Statement, 2014.



***Breaking Words*, 2006**
Tokyo and Toyama, Japan

Breaking Words confronts personal and cultural differences through questioning the concept of so-called "truth." In a poetic call-and-response fashion, audience members offered key words in their lives, which were then written on plates, and then smashed to the ground by the artist. The work calls attention to a reckoning with mental traps that are set by virtue of all belief systems, societal conditionings, and even education. All of which effect tribulations and failures in cross-cultural interaction. This reality was wryly brought out in an iteration of the performance in Kuala Lumpur when an audience member was offended that a plate with the word "Allah" (meaning "God") written on it was smashed. As a result, the police shut down the Satu Kali festival, in which the performance took place.

Leeza Ahmady, *Arahmaiani: Fertility of the Mind*, Curatorial Statement, 2014.



***Handle Without Care*, 2006**

An iteration of this iconic performance was held on top of a hill where the artist, clad in an elaborate quasi-traditional outfit, performed Balinese dance movements around a white circle painted on the ground with a large Coca-Cola bottle placed in the middle. Wearing a striking pair of black sunglasses and holding plastic toy guns in her hands, she incorporates the props into her dance ritual as if in worship. Midway through her performance, she begins to vigorously shake the Coke bottle, which eventually opens in an explosion of pent-up carbonation. A CD player played mantras mixed with gunfire sounds, producing a cacophony of sound and mesmerizing ambiance.

Art is an autonomous zone - a self-standing discourse and narrative, the interests of the market, politics or religion cannot dictate to it. Businessmen, politicians and religious leaders are not creators of art! — Arahmaiani

Leeza Ahmady, *Arahmaiani: Fertility of the Mind*, Curatorial Statement, 2014.



***Stitching the Wound*, 2006**

The Art Center at the Jim Thompson House, Bangkok, Thailand

Arahmaiani's Bangkok project *Stitching the Wound*, actively involving young women from the Baan Krua weaving community, focuses on Muslim issues as a basis for a broader exploration of marginalization, identity and communication. Through interactive performance organized in close proximity with members of the Muslim Baan Krua enclave, Arahmaiani took aim at the assumptions and stereotypes that are often responsible for fanning the flames of misunderstanding and fear at the heart of contemporary Muslim/non-Muslim relations in Southeast Asia, and beyond. The artist, a Javanese Muslim, is also concerned with the weight given to symbols associated with religion that are read and mis-read in such a way as to distort the essence of faith both for its practitioners and those outside its tenets.

Excerpt from the press release for the *Stitching the Wound* exhibition at The Art Center at the Jim Thompson House, Bangkok, Thailand, 2006.



***Stigmata*, 2007**

Japan

Stigmata was a performance in response to the new global politics between the Islamic world and the West (or America in particular). It addresses the position of an individual Muslim woman in a polarized post-September 11th world, where Arahmaiani found herself referred to more and more as a Muslim woman artist, rather than an artist.

Art is a combination of courage, rebellion, rational and moral intelligence, and the conscience.

— Arahmaiani

Leeza Ahmady. *Arahmaiani: Fertility of the Mind*, Curatorial Statement 2014.



***Produk Gertoli*, 2008**

Sanata Dharma, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Arahmaiani's *Produk Gertoli* provides both local and universal readings. On a parochial level, through humor and satire, the work is a critique of environmental destruction in Indonesia. Interpreted more broadly, the images also offer a message of empowerment, prompting viewers to think for themselves about power and society. The painted backdrop depicts a recent environmental disaster in Indonesia.

Excerpt from a 2009 press release from Esplanade Theatres on the Bay, Singapore. Online Resource.



***Dutch Wife*, 2013**

Suspended Histories, Museum Van Loon, Amsterdam

In a group exhibition for Museum Van Loon, artists were asked to reflect on the role of the Van Loon family in the Dutch East India Company. Arahmaiani's installation consists of self portrait photographs presented in formal portrait frames within the setting of a seemingly traditional colonial home, next to official portraits of the Van Loon Family throughout the museum. She is depicted as a suppressed wife, calling attention to ideas of colonial slavery in a modern day context (namely, the condition of migrant Indonesian women workers in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East).

Suspended Histories, Museum Van Loon, 2013. Online Resource.

"Art & Everyday Life: Suspended Histories," *Mister Motley*, 2013. Online Resource.



***Memory of Nature*, 2013**

Installation and Performance, Art Stage, Singapore

This work is based on the artist's on-going project addressing her various environmental concerns on the Tibetan Plateau. *Memory of Nature* symbolizes Ahrahmaiani's collaboration with Tibetan monks, which entails the monks' active and physical participation in reconstructing their agricultural ecology, and transformation of their surrounding landscapes. The installation consisted of a large mandala assembled from natural materials – soil and living plants placed on the floor. The artist waved about and over the mandala a large flag with a yellow lotus flower imprint on its center, referencing her signature work from the past decade known as *The Flags Series*. At the end of the performance, she rakes up the mandala, as a Tibetan monk would traditionally do. Presenting the piece at a commercial art fair referenced the artist's belief that all spaces can become arenas for contemplation about the world, its problems, nature, and spirituality.

Although we are orientated forward, our art remembers and considers the past and the present.
— Ahrahmaiani

Leeza Ahmady, *Ahrahmaiani: Fertility of the Mind*, Curatorial Statement 2014.



***Violence No More*, 2013**

Rapid Pulse International Performance Art Festival, dfb gallery, Chicago; also performed in Singapore

Dressed in red Arahmaiani enters a dark gallery filled with unlit candles placed in a circle where the participants sit. Arahmaiani lies flat on the ground, face down and propels herself in a circular motion by the thrust of her foot. As she pushes herself across the floor, she forcefully blows out a hard breath that seems to provide momentum. She rises to her feet and walks to light a candle. Afterwards, she places it in the palm of an audience member's hand. She then lies back down only to strenuously repeat the painstaking process again until the circle of candles are all burning. The emotionally felt performance embodied the concept of inclusiveness. As Arahmaiani handed a candle to an audience member, the makeshift barrier between audience and artist no longer existed. Instead, a circle united was formed. As she lit every candle and offered it to a chosen audience member, a tangible feeling of solidarity was produced. Aligned with her activism, Arahmaiani's performance aimed to foster peace.

Megan Owoc, "Arahmaiani *Violence No More*," Rapid Pulse International Performance Art Festival, 2013.



Warm Zone, 2013
Singapore

In *Warm Zone*, similar in spirit to *Violence No More*, audience members were given lit candles, this time inviting them to express themselves however they wished in that moment.

ARAHMAIANI

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

Born 1961 in Bandung, Indonesia. Lives and works in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

EDUCATION

1992
BFA, Bandung Institute of Technology, Bandung, Indonesia.

1985
Paddington Art School, Sydney, Australia.

1983
Academie voor Beeldende Kunst, Enschede, the Netherlands.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2014
Fertility of the Mind, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, NY, USA.

2013
The Grey Paintings, Equator ArtProjects, Singapore.

2009
I Love You (After Joseph Beuys Social Sculpture), Esplanade, Singapore.

2008
Slow Down Bro, Jogja National Museum, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

2007
Make-Up or Break-Up, Artspace Sydney, Australia.

2006
Stitching the Wound, Jim Thompson Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand.

2005
Lecturing on Painting, Valentine Willie Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

2004
Wedding Party (LAPEN Wedding), Kedai Kebun Forum, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.
Un-titled, PSI Confrence #10, Singapore.
Soho Baby, 2nd Dadao Live Art Festival, Beijing, China.
Breaking Words, Nagano Expo, Japan.
Breaking Words, FIX04 Belfast, Ireland.

2003
Fusion & Strength, Gallery Benda, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.
MIP (International Performance Manifestation), Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

2002
Visit to My World, Asian Fine Arts Gallery, Berlin, Germany.

1999
Dayang Sumbi: Refuses Status Quo, CCF Bandung, Indonesia.
Rape & Rob, Millennium Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia.

1993
Sex, Religion, and Coca Cola, Oncor Studio, Jakarta, Indonesia.

1987
My Dog is Dead and then He Flew, Centre Culturelle Française, Bandung, Indonesia.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2013
Suspended Histories, Museum Van Loon, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Women In Between: Asian Women Artists 1984-2012, Mie Prefectural Museum of Art, Mie, Japan; and Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Art, Tochigi, Japan.

2012
Lost in China, Gallery 4A, Sydney, Australia.
Marcel Duchamp in Southeast Asia, Equator ArtProjects, Singapore.
Women In-Between: Asian Women Artists 1984-2012, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan.
Edge of Elsewhere 2012, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Campbelltown, Australia; and 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney, Australia.

2011
Edge of Elsewhere, Gallery 4A Sydney Festival, Australia.
Crossing Point, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.
Thread Stitching Wounds, Yogya Biennale, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.
I Love You, Richmond Center for the Arts, Kalamazoo, MI, USA.
Flag Project, Museum of Contemporary Art, Shanghai, China.
Home, Gallery 4A, Sydney, Australia.

2010
Edge of Elsewhere, Sydney Festival, Sydney.
Contemporaneity, MOCA Shanghai, China.
Tough Love, Gallery Plataforma Revolver, Lisbon, Portugal.
My Grandmother's House, Museum Bochum, Bochum, Germany.
I Love You, Ana Tzarev Gallery, New York, NY, USA.
Crossing and Blurring the Boundaries, Andi's Gallery, Jakarta.
Summer Now 2010, Canvas International Art, Amsterdam.
UNERWARTET/UNEXPECTED, Von der islamischen Kunst zur zeitgenössischen Kunst Kunstmuseum Bochum – Kunstmuseum Bochum, Bochum, Germany.
Edge of Elsewhere, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney, Australia.
Installation I, Sydney Festival, Campbelltown Art Centre, Campbelltown, Australia.

2009
No More Bad Girls, Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna, Austria.
My Body, Andi's Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia.
Awareness, Canvas International Art, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

2008
3rd International Calligraphy Biennale, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates.
Die Wahren Orte, Alexander Ochs Gallery, Berlin, Germany.
Strategies Towards the Real, NUS, Singapore.

2007
Global Feminisms, Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY, USA.
Art Goes Heiligendamm, Rostock, Germany.
Balance, Bad Doberan, Germany.
Premonition, J&Z Gallery, Shenzhen, China.

2005

INTOENNE Festival, Austria.
Magnetism – Suspension, Zendai Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai, China.

2004

Twilight Tomorrow, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.
Reformasi, Sculpture Square, Singapore.
Asian Traffic, Gallery 4A, Sydney, Australia.
Art Summit, National Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia.
SENI, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.

2003

The Rest of The World, Pirmasens, Germany.
11 June 2003, Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy.
Don't Call it Performance Art, Reina Sophia Museum, Madrid, Spain; and Andalusia Center for Contemporary Art, Seville, Spain.
Transit, Northern Territory Centre for Contemporary Art, Australia.
10th Biennale of Moving Image, Geneva, Switzerland.

2002

AWAS! Recent Art from Indonesia, Asian Fine Arts Gallery, Berlin, Germany.
Text & Subtext, Sternersen Musset, Oslo, Norway.
Sao Paulo Biennial, Brazil.
Gwangju Biennale, South Korea.
Site + Sight, Lasalle College of the Arts, Singapore.
Upstream Project, Amsterdam & Hoorn, the Netherlands.

2001

His-story on My Body, Hillside Terrace Gallery, Tokyo Japan.
2000
His-story on My Body, Text & Sub-text, Earl Lu Gallery, Singapore; and Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney, Australia. Corporeal Apology, Biennale de Lyon, Lyon, France; and Werkleitz Biennale, Germany.
Le Petit du Chaperon Rooge, Le Ferme Du Buisson, Paris, France.
The Dog's Dream, ISP Open Studio, Tribeca, New York, NY, USA.

1999

Burning Bodies, Burning Countries II, Cultural Centre Philippines (CCP), Manila, the Philippines.
Made In Indonesia No. I, – Un Ab Die Post, Postfuhramt Berlin, Germany.
Newspaper Man II, Semanggi Café, Jakarta, Indonesia.
Cities On the Move, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark; and Hayward Gallery, London, United Kingdom.

1998

Instalasi Gawat Darurat Pembangunan, 4+4 Begegnung, Purna Budaya, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.
Traditions/Tensions, Western Australia Museum of Contemporary Art, Perth, Australia.
Plastic & Other Waste (First Asia-Pacific Artist Solidarity Project), Center for the Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand.
Cities on The Move, Museum of Contemporary Art, Vienna Secession, Austria; Musée de l'Art Contemporaine de Bordeaux, France; and P.S. I Contemporary Art Center, New York, NY, USA.
Traditions/Tensions, Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei, Taiwan.
Burning Bodies, Burning Country, Musée de Castieva, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

1997

Womanifesto: Don't Prevent the Fertility of Mind, Concrete House, Bangkok, Thailand.
Sacred Coke – Cosmology of Mutilation, VI Biennale de la Habana, Havana, Cuba.
Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions, Vancouver Gallery, Vancouver, Canada.
White Cases, Glimpses into the Future, Art from Southeast Asia, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan; and Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima, Japan.

1996

Offerings from A to Z, Chiang Mai, Thailand.
Nation for Sale, Asia-Pacific Triennial, Brisbane, Australia.
Traditions/Tensions, Asia Society, New York, NY, USA.

1995

A Piece of Land for Sale, Artists Regional Exchange (ARX), Perth, Australia.
Sacred Coke, Contemporary Art from Non-aligned Countries, National Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia.
Coke Circle, Claremont Art School, Perth, Australia.

1994

5+5 Indonesian & Dutch Artists, Purna Budaya, Yogyakarta, Indonesia; and Erasmus Huis, Jakarta, Indonesia.
Indonesia in Emergency Aid, Yogyakarta Biennial, Purna Budaya, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

1993

Four Faces, Biennial IX, Jakarta, Indonesia.

1992

From Pieces to Become One-Homage to Joseph Beuys, Enschede, the Netherlands.

1984

Fibre Art and Design, Sydney Textile Museum, Sydney, Australia.

1983

Independent Feast, Bandung, Indonesia.

1980

Accident I, Bandung, Indonesia.

SELECTED PERFORMANCES

2013

Memory of Nature, Art Stage Singapore, Singapore.

2011

Crossing Point, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.
Breaking Words, Richmond Centre for the Arts, Kalamazoo, MI, USA.

2010

Violence No More, On Edge, Cairns, Australia.
Flag/Benera, Kali Opak, Indonesia.

2009

I Love You (After Joseph Beuys Social Sculpture), Esplanade, Singapore.

Breaking Words, Woodford Folk Festival, Brisbane, Australia.
Flag/Bendera, Esplanade, Singapore.

2008
Breaking Words, Sillman University, Dumaguette, the Philippines.
Produk Gertoli, Sanata Dharma, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.
Flag/Bendera, Shenzhen, China and Singapore.

2007
His-story on My Body, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY, USA.
Flag/Bendera, Borobudur, Central Java, and Merapi, Indonesia; Nagano, Japan; Sydney, Australia.
Toyota Era, Matsushiro Samurai School, Nagano, Japan.
Breaking Words, Davis Museum, Boston, MA, USA.
Stigmata, Japan.

2006
Dancing Stitches, JT House, Bangkok, Thailand.
Breaking Words, Satu Kali, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Breaking Words, FOI, Singapore.
Breaking Words, Tokyo, Toyama, Japan.
Flag Performance 1, Rostock, Germany.

2005
Learning to Swing, Valentine Willie Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
We Are Not Hungry, Ambulance International Performance Art Festival, Jakarta, Indonesia

2004
Wedding Party (LAPEN Wedding), Kedai Kebun Forum, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.
Un-titled, PSI Conference #10, Singapore.
Soho Baby, 2nd Dadao Live Art Festival, Beijing, China.
Breaking Words, Nagano Expo, Nagano, Japan.
Breaking Words, FIX04, Belfast, Ireland.

2003
Fusion & Strength, Gallery Benda, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.
MIP (International Performance Manifestation), Belo Horizonte, Brazil.
Don't Call it Performance Art, Reina Sophia Museum, Madrid, Spain; and Andalusia Center for Contemporary Art, Seville, Spain.

2002
Visit to My World, Asian Fine Arts Gallery, Berlin, Germany.

2001
His-story (VIII), Ist Woman Performance Art Festival, Osaka, Japan.
His-story (VIII), Hillside Terrace, Tokyo, Japan.
Violence – Hate No More, 3rd Performance Biennale, Israel.
Violence No More, Indonesia – Japan Exchange 2001. Bandung, Yogyakarta, and Jakarta, Indonesia.
Violence No More, Ludwig Forum, Aachen, Germany.
Violence No More, Edsvik, Solentuna, Sweden.
Violence No More, Odense Performance Festival, Denmark.
Tell Me the Story, Za Hall, Tokyo, Japan; Japan Society, New York, NY, USA; and Shiga Museum, Osaka, Japan.

2000
His-story (III), Werkleitz Biennale, Werkleitz, Germany.
His-story (III), Funkhouse, Dresden, Germany.
His-story, Jakarta International Performance Art Festival (JIPAF 2000), Jakarta, Indonesia.
His-story, NIPAF 2000, Taipei, Nagano, Nagoya, Tokyo, Japan.

1999
Show Me Your Heart, Und Ab Die Post, Postfuhramt Berlin, Germany.
Burning Bodies, Burning Countries II, Cultural Centre Phillipines (CCF), Manila, the Philippines.
Newspaperman, Semanggi Café, Jakarta, Indonesia.
Dayang Sumbi Refuses Status Quo, France Cultural Center, (CCF) Bandung, Indonesia.

1998
Burning Bodies, Burning Country, Musee de Castieva, Almaty, Kazakhstan.
Art Festival '98, Nagano, Nagoya, Hiroshima, Tokyo, Japan.
Festival de Winternachten, the Hague, the Netherlands.
Show Me Your Heart, Nippon International Performance Art Festival, Asian Series, Nagano, Nagoya, Tokyo, Japan.
Show Me Your Heart, JAXPA 98: Festival of Asian Performance Art I, Bangkok, Thailand.
Show Me Your Heart, Cemara 6 Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia; and Jamzz, Jakarta, Indonesia.

1997
Do Not Prevent the Fertility of Mind, Concrete House, Bangkok, Thailand.
Handle without Care IV, Havana, Cuba.
Handle without Care, Who Cares?, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Tokyo.
Point Zero – My Mind Gets Stuck, Marsi Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand.

1996
Offering from A to Z, Chiang Mai, Thailand.
Handle without Care I, Brisbane, Australia.
Handle without Care II – You Love Me, You Love Me Not, Z Gallery, New York, NY, USA.
Handle without Care III, Maga City, Bangkok, Thailand.
Don Giovanni, Kunsthalle Vienna, Austria.
Raised by Wolves, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, Australia.

1995
Friday Sermon, Claremont Art School, Australia.

1994
Frangipani on Water, with musician Wayan Sadra, Mojosongo, Solo, Indonesia.

1993
Four Faces, Biennale IX, Jakarta, Indonesia.

1992
Uwek-uwek, Ismail Marzuki Art Center, Jakarta, Indonesia.

1990
Knocking the Door, Malioboro Street, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

1987
My Dog is Dead and then He Flew, Centre Culturelle Française, Bandung, Indonesia.

1982
Black Bamboo and White Cloth, Bandung, Indonesia.
The Flower, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

1981
Newspaperman, Bandung, Indonesia.

1980
Accident, Bandung, Indonesia.

REFLECTIONS OF A NOMAD DREAMER

ARAHMAIANI

I was born and raised in an environment where various cultures and religious beliefs coexisted peacefully. My ancestors were Animists, Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims. They assimilated influences from without and produced a hybrid culture. A culture that open-heartedly accepts all that is different and takes the good aspects of all faiths, on the basis of a clear and firm platform which is: humanity.

The place I am referring to is located in the tropical zone and was in the past known as the “emeralds of the equator” because of its beauty. The soil was fertile and rich in natural resources, and anything planted would almost always flourish. Food was not difficult to come by because the fertile soil produced abundant harvests and animal stock faced no shortage of food. Not to mention the vast seas that of course brought the blessing of sustenance and wealth. The weather in this country never reaches extreme points – the heat is not too hot and the cold does not torture one. The two seasons that come one after another – dry and wet – do not affect the temperature in any major way. This means that people do not need to busy themselves preparing for the changes in the weather. Life goes on comfortably with only a little adjustment.

But the tides of time and life often do not stay the same; they rise and fall and change their nature, and are also susceptible to destruction and mortality. So the history of life shows different faces, although sometimes a face that appears is similar to one before it. It forms a cycle that does not end, which is at the same time eternally in change. There is an essential life force that always revitalizes itself and also regularly finds its peak to then drop down low until it reaches the bottom and meets its destruction. But this also then appears again to push and give birth to new life and forms a sustainable cycle that no one knows when it will be cut or when it will end.

Now, in this birthplace of mine, the situation has changed to present a saddening face. It is as if there is a curse on life here. Forests have been razed to the ground; most trees have been felled. Water and the air are polluted. All this has occurred because of the actions of mankind. The result is that disaster after disaster falls upon us. Floods are everywhere; earthquakes happen more often on ever more massive scales. Tsunamis, landslides, hurricanes and volcanic eruptions that are out of character and unpredictable. Victims fall left and right, some die, some are wounded, and more lose their homes. Adding up their number would probably reach several millions. True, this region is also known to be on the “Ring of Fire” where three continental plates collide to make this place vulnerable to earthquakes and give birth to at least one hundred and twenty six volcanoes.

Nowadays rivers are full of waste and packed with garbage. Many water sources in Asia have dried up and died; if not, chemicals pollute them. The Yangtze, the Mekong, the Yellow River, the Indus, the Ganges, and the Brahmaputra – all these rivers are sourced in Tibet, the country also known as the Roof of the World. The continuous life of two billion people in Asia depends on these rivers. Besides pollution, another issue to be alert to is the melting of the glaciers and the permafrost, which each day gets worse and worse. At first this will bring about floods and deluges, and this has already begun – but later water will become scarce and rivers will run dry as a bone. Many lakes have experienced a fall in their water debit and some have even dried up. It is not too difficult to imagine what will happen and what the fate of the two billion people will be if draught hits. Besides that, desertification has already happened and slowly but surely the areas affected are becoming wider and wider. If the ecological balance of the vulnerable “Third Pole”, which is the plateau of Tibet, is disturbed, it will be certain that there will be a widespread and dangerous impact for the whole planet.

In my country, much land has become dry and no longer fertile, because of mining and the felling of forests. Some soil has become hardened like cement and polluted by chemical materials that spread through the long-term usage of synthetic fertilizers. The impacts of global climate change are becoming more obvious. Recently there have often been weather anomalies, and in several areas there has been rain all year round. This has caused crop failure, and people have been forced to change their planting patterns. So the already low national food production because of the dependency on imports decreases even more each day. Prices rocket and the poor and almost poor fall deeper into difficulties. The rise of world oil prices and the prolonged political crisis in North Africa and the Middle East will of course aggravate the situation.

Besides all that, another no less worrying thing is the condition of the people themselves. Their mental, intellectual and spiritual life has plummeted in obvious ways. The leaders of the State and the nation, who should be able to become beacons of hope and providers of protection, cannot in anyway be depended on and are unworthy of trust. They hurt people's feelings, they deceive and steal. They have thrown away the mandate that the people gave them. Lightly and without any burden they commit crimes: bribe the law enforcers and security apparatus, manipulate things and misappropriate rules. They busy themselves in filling their coffers and try to make their power everlasting – they are busy with themselves and their cronies. They have no concern whatsoever for the people that elected them to fulfill a job and a responsibility. The State offers no protection; it is truly disappointing.

The beauty of life that I experienced in my childhood has been forcefully and violently wrenched away. Life has become a nightmare, prolonged and merciless. Human relations used to be animated by the heart but nowadays, even though there is more knowledge available, people's relationships are more characterized by mutual efforts to cheat each other and make profit. It is as if the beautiful garden that was once tended to together has been overgrown by wild weeds, and the living beings there hunt each other. People become anxious, unhappy and insecure. They have lost trust in their fellow human beings and are imprisoned in their own worlds. The direction and the goal of life has become a murky sketch that cannot be defined to become a clear picture that radiates beauty.

All this has become a burden that I feel in my heart. To be honest, not all is pitch dark, there is always a prick of light that becomes hope. I can still see a rainbow decorating the gloomy sky. And I remember the times when my grandfather taught and trained me to dance in the dark in silence without music or song. At that time I did not understand and asked why it had to be repeated over and over. My grandfather's answer was short and concise: so that you will be able to dance alone in the dark accompanied by the music and the rhythm of your heart.

Maybe he had understood the signs of changing times – if you do not follow the current in life you will end up all alone in darkness and quiet. So he provided me with something that would prepare me to endure this path. Or maybe he understood the path of my fate and was preparing me to be steadfast in my lonesome and solitary life so that in the end I might reach the destination safely. Ah, life is full of mysteries, and not all can be understood rationally and empirically. Besides, there are also things that have yet to be understood by the "modern" way of thinking. I feel that modern man must be able to humbly acknowledge that not all things and issues in this life are understood. He should also understand that essentially he does not hold a prerogative right to conquer and control nature, let alone to deny the right to life of other beings.

The truth is that I often do not understand why modern man seems to be so over confident in his conviction that there will be an answer to all problems. Relying on science and technology, the modern man holds the view that all problems will find a solution. Ancient cultures that are considered "primitive" are swept aside, and communal life appears to be incompatible with the spirit of individual "invention," those geniuses and bearers of change in life. I do not wholly question this conviction – but when we look at what has happened now, how science and technology has been employed to exploit nature and all it contains, the over confident faith in this capacity surely needs to be challenged.

Now the results are clear and obvious and need no more argument – social disintegration and environmental destruction, partly caused by the impacts of climate change and global warming, trigger more problems, more disasters. Life is threatened by destruction, and steps to avert this must be taken. It is not the time now for lectures and theories, for the call is for real action to save this life. It appears that the free market system has become too free, and it tends to encourage the destruction to be ever faster and ever more massive. Besides, the over-dependency on fossil fuels also only makes the situation ever more perilous, because the natural resources that the earth has are finite – and much is non-renewable.

In my country there are also many religious leaders who do not understand how to think and act wisely. Their ambition is to become politicians and get involved in bribery and corruption. They are hungry for power and money; they forget their tasks and obligations. Religion is employed to achieve and sustain the power they crave. That is how it is here, normally; politicians are full of rhetoric and small talk. They use politics merely as a beast of burden. Shamelessly they wear the mask of hypocrisy, they are two faced. Their behavior and actions are often very embarrassing. On the one side they exhibit an image of a religious person, on the other side they lie and steal. They turn the values of truth up side down with the excuse of protecting the integrity of religion. For that they can tolerate and justify violence, even murder!

How I long for religious practice that is gentle and tolerant. A religious life that does not employ threats and gives

humanity an opportunity to be honest and boldly be one's self, accountable for one's ways and actions. A religious life that can transcend the standards of black and white, "good and evil," "right and wrong," and can offer an opportunity to mankind to understand the meaning of life and the word wisdom. Besides that I also long for the practice of faith that places women on a respected place that is equal to their male partners. Do not discriminate against women anymore; do not place them as merely servants and objects of pleasure. I always want to think positively, and I believe that the intentions of religion are always benign, and that it is man's interpretation that gives mistaken, deviating meanings that support and justify his lusts.

Furthermore, in my country currently religion is even used as a tool to wipe out minorities. There was a very saddening event not so long ago. Three Ahmadiyah followers were tortured and killed. I saw for myself a video of how brutally and sadistically they were done away with. My tears fell watching it. The murderers justified their actions by claiming that they were protecting Islam from deviations which justified their barbaric and inhumane actions. In the name of God and religion human life has been snuffed out forcibly – honestly, I ask: what religion is this? God's name has been misused for evil so that now God and religion have become sources of hatred and atrocities. With this situation maybe God would be happy to just die, if with that mankind could once again experience love and mercy for each other.

The concept and approach of the "Middle Way" that doesn't polarize right and wrong is important to me. It does not emphasize the attitude of fighting against passions but tries to understand them and find ways to manage, control, and correctly place them. So it doesn't take the extreme path of vehement rejection, but also doesn't let passions loose unbridled. Also the natural way of looking at the body is important to me. The body should not be seen as the source of shame and sin, so that sex can be put in its natural place and not be burdened by negative thoughts of dirtiness. It should be seen more as a liberating activity and a means to achieve the spiritual union of the feminine and masculine energies. Women need not be seen as temptresses who cause men to fall into Hell.

I think that modern man needs to have his thoughts "stood on their head." When a belief and a faith becomes dogmatic in nature, or when it becomes merely "blind faith" where rationality merely seems to be working, then something wrong also begins to happen. Whatever the name of that faith, religion or ideology can become stuck; it can decay, and strangle life, because it becomes inflexible and rigid – not liquid and flowing like water. It will become coercive, and it will tend to bring difficulties. Modern man, who is so confident and believes that his thought and logical system can never be wrong, appears to have fallen in to a trap: he is over confident in his faith that the world can be controlled by rationality. The market system and ideology that is vulnerable to crisis but believed as a religion, apparently has trapped him. And it has been proven that these market fundamentalists bring so much complication, only make a few wealthy, and bring poverty to the majority of the earth's population, and even create war.

Sometimes I wake up in the middle of a silent night and I ponder on the meaning of life and this existence. The darkness of the sky and the silence of nature take me to thoughts of death. I think that there is no one who does not fear this reality – that life has an end and the reality of leaving our loved ones brings sadness. This is the reality; there is nothing fixed and permanent in life. Like a butter sculpture exposed to heat will melt and change its form or become liquid and evaporate, losing its form altogether.

Modern man's lifestyle tends to emphasize the material world. The reality of death seems to be taken merely as the end of a process of transaction. There is nothing sacred and nothing holy anymore. The purpose of life is to achieve everything here and now because after death all is finished. So there is no use to waste time or energy thinking about it. Remember, time is money! And money is the source of power and the source of all pleasure. Man is considered to be stupid and idiotic if he doesn't think that way. This is the modern world that is considered to be progressive, but in reality it has become decadent.

I believe that from pure thoughts and pure hearts brilliant ideas that will bring benefit to life will emerge. And I believe that this is the essence of creativity that can liberate mankind and life from the grips of sadness and suffering, besides bringing mankind to recognize and to be capable of experiencing real happiness. As a creative worker I feel that I really and truly want to understand it. I want to transcend the understanding of individual creativity that only revolves around one's self, which usually is then re-represented by the market, collected and finishes there. Is it true that collective creativity is dead? And if it is considered dead can it be resurrected? This is the essence of the matter that I have been struggling with for at least the past two decades.

Perhaps these are merely the thoughts and ideas of a nomad dreamer. But because I dream and maybe also have too many illusions, I have met and worked with various marginal communities in various countries. From village

communities in the Bantul district and the slopes of Merapi, to communities in Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, China, and Aborigines in Australia. I believe that all the occupants of this planet have the right to live in their own ways as long as they do not infringe on others.

When the dominant system gets stuck and is threatened by failure, everything starts to be questioned. Those who have been marginalized because their values in life are considered to be incompatible now seem to have a place and are able to negotiate. This is the time for the oppressed to hold hands, even though no one knows exactly what the answer to the current problems faced by the world is. No one can give an exact answer to the question regarding what system of living would be suitable for the future. There is no single answer that can be applicable for all the occupants of planet earth. Apparently the most realistic is that each community and cultural unit must find a way to become self sufficient – while at the same time cooperate with other communities to create a system that supports living in harmony with nature so that the ecological balance is not put at risk.

The tendency of those who are in power and are dominant is to force all parties into submission – even more so if the other is rich in natural resources. Many ways will be used to conquer them. They will have no qualms in being hypocrites and practicing double standards to achieve their ambitions. The right to life of the weak will be overruled; if they are not eliminated they will be forced into poverty. Yes, apparently politicians everywhere are the same; on one side they present an image of piety and culture but on the other they act unnaturally and are often deceitful. But in reality the weak survive. It seems that mankind must always struggle with power and should not tire of it. Unsurprisingly, the Muslim youth are now rising and confronting the oppression of the dictators who have become the extension of foreign powers from the West. The crisis in the strategic areas of the Middle East and North Africa apparently will push for change in the world. Those who are established and in power but act unjustly and arbitrarily will be confronted. There is only one opportunity to take for those who wish to remain in power: to change the system to be more transparent and to uphold social justice for their society.

A decade ago when the bombing of the World Trade Center by the so-called Muslim terrorists happened, the world was shaken by a political earthquake that polarized the world into the West and Islam. The world's Muslim communities were stigmatized and tarred with the same brush as followers of a violent religion of terrorism. I understand this is a constructed notion and not the reality. Since the flowering of the Iranian Revolution, the Western media have actively constructed an ugly image of Islam and its adherents. But in reality, research presents proof that the majority of Muslims are the moderates, and they do not like violence, do not hate Westerners, and also do not consider their religion to be a religion that tolerates violence.

Also with the accusations against Iraq as a producer of weapons of mass-destruction that was used as the pretext of the invasion and the occupation, in reality there was never any proof that was found. Indeed politics tends to resemble a mud hole and power tends to be full of deceit and falsehood. This sort of thing always happens again and again in various places through out mankind's history. Meanwhile, on the other side, the radical Islamist groups make use of the situation for their own interests; they also do not hesitate to destroy and murder. So the international political stage today is a stage soaked with the blood of victims who often have no clue of the issues. So unfair treatment by one person to another, or one group to another, is currently normal. An ethical attitude is not considered to be important.

The assumption and the theory that so far has been developed in the West that says that the Islamic world and democracy are incompatible, has been proven to be wrong. Maybe this theory is merely an excuse to justify support of dictatorial regimes. Indeed, the advanced Western world is not immune to hypocrisy – on one side promoting democracy while on the other supporting “Third World” dictators who protect their interests and support their agenda. They accuse other parties of committing terror acts, but when they invade and occupy a country through military action that kills and maims many people; this is not defined as a terror act even though it is obvious that there are parties who are terrorized. However, if the reverse happens, automatically the aggressor is accused of being a terrorist. It feels that there is something out of place here; there are two different values implemented for an issue that is more or less the same.

Indeed the world and the Islamic community, just like other social groups, have many issues that must be solved. Beginning from the inequalities in the social life in many poor or dictatorial Muslim countries, the position of women that tend to be seen as unequal to men, religious freedom and minority rights that are not respected, or the lack of interest on the issues of the environment But the world has also witnessed how these societies, faced with a heap of problems, do not remain neglectful and indifferent to the situation. They persevere in the search for solutions. And the Muslim societies, of which the majority chose the way of moderation, are basically open to the system of

democracy and are ready to confront the radicals.

Muslim women who feel that they are not treated equally are also not just staying silent. They strive to find ways out so that women can get access to education that can raise their status and dignity. The fact is that women's movements are continuously developing even though they do receive challenges from the conservatives who are no less dogged in their resistance. What is more of a problem is when these local/national issues are used by other parties to push their own agendas and forward their own interests. Just like the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan was done with the pretext of saving the women from the oppression by their men. The Western tendency to see problems in black and white, the practice of intervention as the "world's police" cannot be allowed to continue.

The Western world that is considered to be advanced and is upheld as a model by non-Western nations, currently is displaying various weaknesses in all too obvious ways. Of course its leadership is now also being questioned. And of course the dark history of the colonial episode, as well as the aggressive tendency that manifests in the initiative to attack and go to war in the past and in the present, is a weak point that cannot be denied. Colonialism creates trauma that lasts a long time and creates psychological problems that are very serious even though an ethical policy has been implemented to restore the self-respect and the dignity of the colonized.

At least this is what I understand from the experience of the Indonesian nation that was once colonized for over 300 years by the Dutch. And after over 65 years of independence, there is no escaping from the wounds and marks and the trauma of inferiority. This is besides the other problem related to the capability of organizing and cooperating, which during the times of colonialization was always being repressed and fragmented. Meanwhile, on the other hand those who do the colonizing are also not immune to psychological problems – they experience superiority complexes that cause various tangled issues that continue to play a role right up to today. The Western arrogance of power now has manifested as the control of the market and multinational capital, which essentially is a new form of colonialism. So it is not surprising that the din of the global life that is controlled by the capitalist economic system is in such a mess because of the volume of blood spilt and the darkness of violence.

However, I believe that aggression and violence essentially cannot be defeated by violence because that will only begin a chain of more violence. I am a believer in an anti-violence philosophy as a life path and as a solution to problems. I salute and have the utmost respect for anti-violence figures like Mahatma Gandhi, and also, naturally, the Dalai Lama, and also for figures like the Tibetan Buddhist monk Sonam Rinchen – our meeting was so unexpected and so short but it carved a special mark in the depths of my heart. He is present in the correct time. Even though uninvited, the fact is that he came. It is impossible for me to forget him. He made me dive down to the depths of my heart – to once more examine the past and things that had been unintentionally dropped or forgotten. He made me able to imagine a more optimistic future and change the often-returning nightmare into hope. The future that only exists in a dream now appears to be a possibility, that we might manifest it in reality. I no longer feel afraid and bitter, let alone anxious.

The chaotic, aggressive, and harsh world needs an oasis that is cool and gentle to be able to continue its life. Mankind needs the feeling of security and love because that is what will make him feel at home in this world. Recently I have been asking more often about the meaning of life and its continuity – is life simply a journey that begins with birth and ends with death? Is it merely a linear line, is it merely that simple? What is really valuable in this life? What are the functions of ties and mutual dependence in life, apart from bringing sides closer?

The past, the present, and the future are related and continuous. Life comes and goes, forming a continuous cycle like an upward moving spiral. Mankind and nature are not separate entities: nature is not an object to conquer and exploit. Nature is like the body that cannot be separated from the soul; both support and strengthen each other. The soul is not more important or nobler than the body, and it can find liberation through the existence of the body by discovering and understanding all the facts in the universe and then managing and working on them. So it is in the relationship between thoughts and the body, there should be unity of thought and action. Nature and other beings are an integral part of the self. So the I is not standing alone, surveying its surroundings as an object to hold power over.

Reflections of a Nomad Dreamer was compiled based on a letter written by Arahmaiani to the Tibetan Buddhist monk Sonam Rinchen on March 18, 2011.

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ARAHMAIANI
FERTILITY OF THE MIND

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