

YVONNE SPIELMANN, *Indonesian Contemporary Arts: Artists, Art Spaces, and Collectors*. (NIAS Monographs, 138). Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2017. 240 pages, £40.00. ISBN 978-87-7694-230-4

Many Indonesian artists have made a name in the Asian contemporary art world, with record-breaking prices at auction houses in Hong Kong and Singapore. However, even though Indonesian art has achieved a prominent position in the Asian market, it remains relatively unknown to the global arts world.

This book is a refreshing introduction to Indonesian artists, art spaces and collectors. Yvonne Spielmann provides original and stimulating views which seek to free the appraisal of Indonesian arts from a solely Eurocentric perspective. Wary of the privileging self-referential system of Western art production, Spielmann contends that the Western generalising standards of modern and contemporary arts are incommensurable with the evaluation of Indonesian art.

Spielmann writes with a rare insight about the arts in Indonesia. The key to the originality of this book is that the writer's knowledge of Indonesian art results from extended in-depth research conducted in several countries in Asia, sometimes with non-English sources previously inaccessible to a global audience. As might be expected, the author is well informed about Indonesian art history and its socio-political context in the broader Southeast Asian region. She offers an approach that values Indonesian artistic expressions of identity and the "self-confidence syncretism of style" (p. 56). Indonesian artists, in her view, are well versed in a syncretic language of art rooted in Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. They employ plural juxtapositions of several influences of local ethnic traditions (such as those of Java, Bali and West Sumatra) and Western influences, especially the former Dutch colonial and Western pop culture.

One of the most interesting aspects of the book is the emphasis on subversive political motives in Indonesia art. Spielmann highlights the recurrent condemnations of colonialism and the draconian New Order regime, and the resistance against Islamism, patriarchy and racist ideologies, as well as criticism towards Universalism in art production and standards. Spielmann asserts that "politics and aesthetics are closely tied in issues of the production of art" (p. 51) in Indonesia. This does not mean that more abstract and apolitical artworks do not exist in Indonesia. Indonesian artworks are quite diverse, as illustrated by the high-quality photographs found in the book.

Indonesian artists' contributions to the art exhibitions in Asia and Europe mark the "internationalisation" of Indonesian arts since the 1980s. This book tries to problematise why Indonesia is considered a major player in the Asian art world, showcased disproportionately in major art galleries in Asia. The art world is bound to the market economy, yet the success of Indonesian art in the

Asian market has not transferred to international recognition. As Spielmann rightly suggests, there is an imbalance between production, on the one hand, and presentation and distribution, on the other. Indonesian art is generally created from non-governmental initiatives with minimum state support – and in fact many galleries and art spaces in Indonesia are owned by artists proud of their independence from the state, with the exhibition and distribution of art mostly undertaken by private art institutions. Even as these institutions increasingly cater to the growing global market and to collectors, there is the risk that the access of the Indonesian public to the arts may well become limited if not severely diminished if the presentation and distribution of art is increasingly privatised.

This important book presents an evocative exposition of notable contemporary artists such as FX Harsono, Agus Suwage, Heri Dono, Nasirun and many others. Special mention is given to women artists such as Christine Ay Tjoe, Mella Jaarsma, Arahmaini, Melati Suryodarmo, Tintin Wulia and others. Overall, this book is a good starting point for a deeper acquaintance with the most important figures in Indonesia, both contemporary and past artists and their works. The book provides one of the most complete descriptions of Indonesian contemporary art, despite some repetitive ideas in several paragraphs. In her effort to stay true to the non-native speakers and sources, Spielmann suggests that any effort to improve the non-standard grammar and style of the quoted non-native-English sources would not have been acceptable. This decision should be admired even though it requires extra effort from readers to clearly understand the meanings intended by the non-native speakers.

In the light of the opening of the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara (Museum MACAN), Indonesia's first contemporary and modern art museum in Jakarta, as well as the Jakarta Biennale and Biennale Jogja exhibitions – all of which took place in November 2017 – the publication of the English version of *Indonesian Contemporary Arts* comes just at the right time.

*Sita Hidayah*