DADANG CHRISTIANTO. WOUNDS IN OUR HEART.
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Edited by Caroline Turner and Nancy Sever

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The one who floats and disappears (River series), 2009. (cat. No. 14)
I hide in my heart (River series), 2009, (cat. No.15)
FOREWORD

The ANU Drill Hall Gallery is pleased to present Wounds in our heart, the largest solo exhibition that the leading Indonesian-Australian artist Dadang Christanto has yet presented in this country.

Dadang Christanto was born in Indonesia and has lived in Australia since 1999. He studied art at Yogyakarta where he worked with other artists and community groups across a range of visual and performing arts.

His work reflects his strong commitment to human rights and social justice. Over the years he has used painting, drawing, performance, sculpture and installation to explore the nexus between power and violence to speak eloquently for the victims of political oppression and social injustice and to be a voice for those who have been persecuted because of religious beliefs or ethnicity. This exhibition addresses these issues through painting, drawing and batik, a medium that the artist has recently taken up.

Dadang Christanto’s work has long been a criticism of systemic violence wherever it has occurred, most notably the horrors of the political purges of the 1960s in Indonesia that visited such loss and pain upon his family. His work continues to demonstrate the subversive power of art and its ability to generate public awareness of what some governments try to suppress.

The artist has exhibited widely in major international exhibitions in Australia, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the USA. His work is represented in national and State art institutions in Australia, including the major sculptural works Heads from the North and Red Rain at the National Gallery of Australia and They Give Evidence, which was the opening exhibition in the new Asian Galleries at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2004. Dadang Christanto has had a long association with the Australian National University through the Research School of Humanities and the Arts, the School of Art, where he has been a Visiting Fellow on three occasions, the Drill Hall Gallery and his work Witness in the ANU Sculpture Park.

I would like to thank the artist for agreeing to exhibit at the Drill Hall Gallery. I am indebted to Dr Caroline Turner, ANU Senior Research Fellow, School of Cultural Inquiry, at the Research School of Humanities and the Arts, for curating the exhibition and, along with Dr Glen Barclay, for the erudite essay in this catalogue. Dr Turner has been the driving force behind a decade long program of conferences, exhibitions and publications about art and human rights, of which this exhibition is part. This parallels her association with Dadang Christanto which goes back to 1993 when she was Deputy Director of the Queensland Art Gallery and Co-founder of the Asia Pacific Triennial Project, she selected his work for the First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art. Films of his performances will be shown as part of our exhibition. We would also like to thank the National Gallery of Australia, the Queensland Art Gallery, Jackie Menzies and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Aaron Seeto and 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, the ANU Research School of the Humanities and the Arts, Jan Manton Art, Brisbane, Galleriesmith, Melbourne, Phil Abbott of Goanna Print, Tony Oates, Jeanette Brand, and the team at the Drill Hall Gallery.

Nancy Sever Director, ANU Drill Hall Gallery and Art Collection
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Dadang Christanto's poetic art has over the years an extraordinary capacity to 'speak' to audiences in many countries and across many cultures. Perhaps great appeal of his art is his focus on the question of what it is to be 'human', his empathy with victim of oppression and in the simplicity of his ultimate message: 'why not justice?' The experience of tragedy for Dadang is universal, transcending nation, culture and religion. Much of his art is founded on events in Indonesia and elsewhere which have moved him deeply, but themes such as the 'violence' of poverty and the exploitation of the poor by the rich are no unique to any society: they are part of the universal human predicament. This exhibition of his work is a important contribution to the long running 'Art an Human Rights' research project at ANU.'

The works in this, his largest solo exhibition in Australia to date, reveal many new dimensions of Dadang's life and art, including his return to painting in recent years and the significance of drawing in his oeuvre. As an artist activist in Indonesia Dadang focussed on large scale installation and performances which could connect with ordinary people, often outside a museum or gallery context. Dadang has said: 'My works are my parliament, art is my forum for discussion ... I want to shock people into thinking and questioning!' His own life has undoubtedly been shaped by an event which occurred when he was 6 years old - the disappearance and presumed murder of his father, taken away by local militias during the Indonesian 'Killing Times' of 1965-66 when the Suharto regime took power. Dadang's mother and four siblings never saw him again. More than two
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The commitment in his art to this search for truth and for justice is uncompromising. Dadang has always since his earliest years as an art student been a dedicated activist speaking for victims of oppression. However, it was only after he moved to Australia in 1991 and with the end of the Suharto regime that he has been able to speak about the specifically Indonesian inspiration for many of his works. Yet Dadang is not a 'political' artist: in his art there is no ideology, unless it is the simple ideology of pleading for social justice. As Pat Hoffie has observed: "... the ones who take up the responsibility of keeping memories of justice alive are the artists. Memories of justice, of compassion and memories of the price of fear and terror..."2

Dadang was born in the village of Tejakula, West Java, Indonesia in 1957. He studied art in Yogyakarta and some of the early drawings in this exhibition date from his art school days. They reveal a strong identification with ordinary and humble people going about their daily tasks in the markets, railways station and temples. Some also deal with the lives of his fellow students working in art and theatre. Dadang was part of and inspired by the Bengkel Theatre company of Indonesia's famous poet and activist, the late W.S Rendra. After College he was involved with
NGO organisations on issues of social justice and was associated in the 1980s with the Indonesian New Art Movement, a group of young artists who challenged the existing art and political establishment. His work Ballad for Sukardal in their 1987 Jakarta exhibition Fantasy World Supermarket ('Jogja Young Arts') was about the suicide of a beak driver who lost his livelihood when this form of bicycle taxi was banned in his home city of Bandung. It was a memorial to the poor and oppressed and, as would be many of his works, an epitaph for the victims of oppression and those who have been waylaid by the process of history and development'. Dadang's first solo exhibition overseas as a contemporary Indonesian artist was in 1991. It was the beginning of an international career which has seen his works exhibited in major exhibitions in Japan, Korea and other Asian countries, the US, Europe, Cuba, Brazil, New Zealand and Canada, as well as in Australia.

The remarkable capacity of Dadang's art to appeal from the local to the universal was demonstrated by his installation for the First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane in 1993, entitled in deliberately cryptic style **For Those: Who have been killed: Who are poor, Who are suffering, Who are oppressed, Who are voiceless, Who are powerless, Who are burdened, Who are victims of violence, Who are victims of a dupe.** The large installation was composed of a series of hanging pieces created from bamboo and palm leaf, reminiscent of a forest, or a beautifully crafted musical instrument. While undoubtedly linked to his later series *The Testimonies of the Trees*, in which the trees bear silent witness to hidden graves in the forest and the hanging pieces with their rounded tops have a roughly human form like bodies, the main clue to their meaning in 1993 was the title.

The work was in fact a response to the Indonesian massacres of 1965-1966, and also to the recent atrocities by the Indonesian Security Forces in East Timor and the Dili cemetery massacre of 1991, of which Dadang had become aware only when he saw the events reported on Australian television. But it would have been virtually suicidal for him to have spoken openly about these issues at the time. The deliberately enigmatic title left the Queensland audiences free to interpret the installation as a memorial to all victims anywhere. Most seem to have assumed that it referred to currently ongoing atrocities in the former Yugoslavia; many saw it as symbolising their own grief over personal tragedies; and a number took it as a reference to the death in Queensland Police custody of the Indigenous dancer Daniel Yok, a few months before the exhibition opened. There was almost no reference to Indonesia in the hundreds of flowers and notes left by those who saw and were moved by the installation and the performance which accompanied it.
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It was possible to display works against social injustice in Indonesia during the Suharto years, so long as the terms were not too specific and one did not mention the 'Unspeakable Horror' or other atrocities perpetrated by the regime, of which indeed many Indonesians not directly affected may possibly have been unaware. And Dadang continued to rage against the exploitation of the poor and the expropriation of their land in works such as the monumental 1001 Munusia Tanah/Earth People in 1996, an installation of 1000 larger than lifesize fibreglass figures [with
Mereka Memberi Kesaksian/They Give Evidence, 1996/1997
Installation at the Hiroshima Art Museum (left) and Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (right)
Fibreglass, brick powder, stone and clothes. Dimensions variable
Collection: Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (Japan) and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (Australia)
Photo courtesy the artist

himself as the 1001[9]), an imposing symbol of the rejected of the earth, referring specifically to those who had lost their land in the building of the Kendang Ombo dam in Central Java. The installation extended for more than 500 metres along the Jakarta beachfront at Ancol, with the lights of the great city providing a shimmering, sinister background as the figures gradually collapsed and vanished in the waves as those whom they represented had vanished before the advance of consumerist enterprise. Another monumental sculptural installation Mereka Memberi Kesaksian/They give Evidence, now in the Art Gallery of NSW collection, was similarly representational, a group of larger than life terracotta figures standing in formal lines holding in their outstretched arms bundles of clothes suggesting the bodies of victims, perhaps children. It had a major effect in 1996 on Japanese audiences, who spontaneously left flowers and poems about universal suffering, as the Brisbane audience had in 1993. As with all Dadang’s works, these were manifestly representations of ordinary people, men and women, representing a vast body of suffering humanity, equally silent but eloquent witnesses. They transcend time and place. Through the offerings proffered they plead for humanity, even as they remind us of our complicity in allowing such atrocities to occur over the centuries of human existence. In his 2003 performance at the AGNSW the artist wrapped the figures and slowly and respectfully cut away their coverings.

In New York in 1996 his work for the Traditions / Tensions exhibition at the Asia Society, consisting of a pyramid of terracotta heads, again suggested to audiences the concept of universal victims, particularly the Cambodian genocide of 1975-79, although its symbolism referred directly to the Indonesian massacres of 1965-1966. It was followed by the series Kekerasan/Violence, of which the most shocking and horrific work was Sate Manusia/ Cannibalism, or Jakarta-Solo Memorials, May 13, 14, 15, 1998, responding to the sexual assaults on Chinese women in Indonesian cities during riots in which many Chinese were raped or deliberately burned to death in shopping malls by the rioters. However, his most emotionally searing work on this theme was probably his performance in September 1999 for the Third Asia-Pacific Triennial in association with his installation Api di Bulan Mei 1998/Fire in May 1998. The 47 larger-than-life sized sculptures created from papier-mâché their hands raised in supplication, were set alight as a memorial to the victims. But the figure had a wider meaning. One member of the audience of around 1,000 suggested that the figures burned because nobody answered their appeal for help. And in the words he spoke to the audience before the performance Dadang also referred to the events then occurring in East Timor where mobs supported by the Indonesian Government were wreaking havoc after the vote for independence and before the UN intervened.

In 1999 Dadang and his family moved to Australia after he was appointed Lecturer in Southeast Asian Contemporary Art at Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory. ‘I didn’t leave, but I moved from Indonesia’, he later explained his decision to settle in Australia. While living in Darwin he was able, as he put it, ‘to gain a consciousness about the expression of identity – personally and as a minority ... I feel free from the stigma so I am able to speak of issues related to myself, as a child victim of 65’ and the discrimination of being a Tiangho (Chinese) minority[10]. Indonesians of Chinese descent had suffered State discrimination and communal violence in Indonesia). He was, for example, able to answer his
audience had in 1993. As with all Dadang's works, these were manifestly representations of ordinary people, men and women, representing a vast body of suffering humanity, equally silent but eloquent witnesses. They transcend time and place. Through the offerings proffered they plead for humanity, even as they remind us of our complicity in allowing such atrocities to occur over the centuries of human existence. In his 2003 performance at the AGNSW the artist wrapped the figures and slowly and respectfully cut away their coverings.

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The move to Australia saw him return to painting and drawing as a medium while continuing to undertake major sculptural installations and performances. He now felt free to use Chinese elements in his art, embellishing works with strokes reminiscent of Chinese calligraphy, although he cannot read Chinese characters or speak the language. His palette was however still uncompromisingly limited to convey
his message as forcibly as practicable. 'The red are wounds', he told Hendro Wiyanto, 'the black is obscurity, the evidence that is black, there is no connection with race, nor does it blossom or contain other colours.' But there were also touches of gold, the symbol of enlightenment, reliving the symbolism of the horrors to which his paintings referred.

The artistic message for which this starkly uncompromising palette was designed was the essence of what Dadang termed his Count Project, which he embarked upon in 1999, expressing his renewed anxieties about what has happened in the twentieth century. In the past century there have been massacres everywhere, bloodshed everywhere. Violence just to make people suffer. He had accordingly been 'counting the victims of violence. The images of different sized heads or even the small dots in my drawings represent the victims. Each head of the victims has scratches of red and black in the brain as a record of the darkness and violence of the memories of these events.' The significance of the head for Dadang was as the site of memory. And his passionate overriding concern has always been to keep alive the memory of the victims of 1965/66, whose names have never been recorded, whose graves are unknown, whose murderers have never been identified, let alone called to account, and reference to whose fate has been expunged from all print or photographic record in Indonesia.

President Abdurrahman Wahid had officially forbidden further discrimination over the events of 1965-1966 and made a further move towards reconciliation in 2001-2002 by lifting the ban in Indonesia on celebrating the Chinese New Year and the public display of Chinese characters. In 2003 Dadang completed in Australia the work Hujan Merah/ Red Rain, responding again to the events of 1965-1966, but also entertaining the possibility of reconciliation, as have all his recent works, to varying degrees. Like so many of his art works it has universal resonance and a haunting presence. As Sasha Grishin observed, the 'ability to create a poignant visual metaphor, which has power, beauty and ambiguity, is one of the most precious properties of Dadang Christanto's art.' The lyrical large drawings on rice paper in this exhibition similarly convey a sense of beauty, ambiguity and also fragility. Yet the subject matter is forceful. The Boot evokes the terror inspired under the Suharto regime and all too many others by the stamp of a steel-shod military boot, recalling George Orwell's devastating vision of the future, 'a boot stamping on a human face - forever'. And Cleaning with a Dirty Broom suggests, not too subtly, that the alleged reforms of the New Order were largely illusory because of the flawed dispositions of those applying them.

In Red Rain (now in the Collection of the National Gallery of Australia, having been shown in the 2003 'Art and Human Rights' exhibition at the ANU), red threads fall like a shower of rain from the ceiling, attached to 1,965 small very beautiful drawings of heads encased in plastic, symbolising official identity cards, required by the state to authenticate personal identity. In works such as Never Ending Stories 2008 the artist reuses this concept of small drawings of heads – in the latter installation abandoned in a heap on the floor. But personal identity is not an issue in death. The 2007 installation, I Found Your Face on the Street, part of the Count Project, also explores this theme and recalls his earlier predilection for 'humble' materials, consisting of 45 pieces of used cardboard, covering an area of 250 cm by 450 cm. The squares are covered with gold dots, each square bearing a
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One of the most interesting aspects of Dadang’s art has been the performance associated with his works, to bring them to life as he has put it. In the 2003 performance Litsus or Portrait of a Family, he worked with his young son Tugungun Tan Arun, then the same age, eight years old, as Dadang had been when his father disappeared. In Litsus the audience throws missiles, small rice flour filled ‘bombs’, at the seated silent figures. In Searching displaces Bones (2005), the audience witnessed a body (the artist), slowly unwrapped as in an archaeological excavation by a young girl, on that occasion Klau Setanggi Timur, who represents the new generation searching for the past and at the same time another generation of victims. The work was inspired, the artist has said, by the bodies carried out from the excavations at Srebrenica in the former Yugoslavia but also symbolises his search for his own father. In Washing the Wounded he told Melanie Eastburn: ‘I used dripping water, as the monotonous sound can be like the sound of terror for the audience. The water was to clean dried blood from family photos. Washing the Wounded was like a healing. Sometimes I feel tired always having my dark story with me, weighing on my shoulders, and I need to rest for a while. For me, creating and sharing washing the wound was cathartic – emotionally and psychologically purifying’. And for those who watched this is also true and especially in the extraordinary performance Survivor, commemorating the disaster when mud began flowing from a gas-drilling bore-hole in the Sidoarjo region of East Java in May 2006, killing 13 people and displacing some 50,000.
In the first performance at Tugu Proklamasi (Proclamation) Square in Jakarta, Dadang and around 600 volunteers sat quietly caked in mud throughout the day, holding portraits of the victims. The repeat performance at Gallery 4A in Sydney in 2009 was on a smaller scale, but no less poignant in its symbolism: 30 volunteers, male and female, from various ethnic backgrounds, were similarly covered with mud and holding portraits of the victims for three hours. It was an almost static performance, except as Dean Chan has observed: "the performers subtly change poses throughout the piece. These are bodies that can tire, sweat, shiver and lose balance" befitting a work 'which is ultimately about corporeality, fragility and tenacity of human experience'.

Survivor had many resonances, indeed almost prediction, with Christanto's moving performance at the QAG in 1999: For Those Who have been Killed, when he moved among the bamboo pieces of the installation covering a house, with a fine mist of artificial blood. It was also related to the performance at Ancol in 1996, when he made himself the 1001st Earth Human among the 1000 fibreglass figures, and at the NGA in 2004 where he swam among the Heads from the North embracing individual heads, the faces of those whose heads were those of his mother and father.

In an interview in the Indonesian periodical Suara Merdeka in 2005 the artist indicated that he had been considering for some time modifying his artistic approach. He was understandably finding it 'very tiring to continue to speak of life with themes related to the wounds of a generation. I think that, as a victim, I will continue to give meaning to these ill-feelings. However, I don't wish to be stuck in this hole of violence and blood' themes. Moreover, he was 'afraid that if I speak of violence issues in a veiled manner, I will only reproduce violence. If I did that,
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His paintings in The Mountains at the Drill Hall Gallery in 2008 were refined and soft beyond anything that he had done before, having the impact of a sunburst, employing the full range of primary colours, green and blue as well as the familiar red, black and gold, delicate, glowing, gorgeous, iridescent and dazzling. It was of course all the more poignant for those.
who knew the story behind the pictures, that the term ‘Mountains’ represented vast accumulations in Indonesian idiom; that mountains have always had enormous spiritual resonance in Buddhist and even pre-Buddhist cosmology; and that the vast accumulations in The Mountains were accumulations of dots representing heads of victims become too numerous to count. The Count Project had become a project uncounted and uncountable.

Another of the most precious properties of Dadang’s art has always been his capacity to surprise, to reinvent, to produce seemingly endless and unwearied variations on a theme. It is of course self-evident that, as Dadang expressed it, ‘my work is open to interpretation, so anybody is able to interpret or dialogue with that work.’ This must be true of all art, to a greater or lesser degree. It is however remarkable for viewers to respond so strongly to the work of an artist even without any comprehension of the actual inspiration or even the real subject of the work, interpreting it in their own terms like the viewers in the Queensland Art Gallery who understood For Those: Who have been killed to relate to the atrocities at that time in the former Yugoslavia, or the jogger who assumed that Dadang’s installation Heads from the North in the sculpture courtyard of the National Gallery of Australia must necessarily refer to the episode of the Tange in 2001. But the resonance is universal, one of outrage at acts of human injustice, exactly the effect that Dadang wishes to produce.

Heads were also the most potent symbol in his painting commemorating the victims of the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami. The painting, 7 by 3 metres, is his response to the catastrophe, Such a beautiful morning, the Sun stab us in the back. Dadang had been relaxing with his family when he saw on TV the report of the fifth worst natural disaster in recorded history, occasioning the deaths of some 230,000 people, 170,000 of them in his own country of Indonesia, in North Sumatra and Aceh, already ravaged by 28 years of struggle for independence. Dadang said that he felt as though he had been struck in the heart. He went immediately to his studio and started painting. The giant work was finished within forty eight hours. The title expressed his sense of outrage at what he perceived as the treacherous violence of nature. Human beings suffered enough to his mind from the systemic violence of other human beings, without having nature ‘stab us in the back’.

The huge sand-coloured painting displays a multitude of complex forms in darker brown encompasasing the heads of drowned victims outlined in white, perhaps suggesting the departing souls of those victims. The work has been toured in Southeast Asia and Dadang has been donating other works for the relief of tsunami victims.

But the new painting style is most manifest in The Rivers series 2010. The reference was, as usual, painfully specific: its inspiration is quite precisely the bodies, often decapitated, floating down the Brantas River during the ‘Killing Times’ of 1965/66, some of the bodies disfigured further by the sticks which village children had thrown at them for diversion as they passed by. A young friend of Dadang’s in those years recalled how she and other children would also throw coconuts at the floating bodies, not understanding what they were. But the poses of the bodies are languorous, although perhaps accidentally suggesting crucifixion to a viewer familiar with Christian imagery, the details vague and the colours soft and delicate, reflecting Dadang’s new resolve to ‘represent this terror in a most refined way’, if not exactly a ‘happier work’.

And terror is indeed represented in the most refine way in the paintings in the series Behind the Veil, created by Dadang for the present exhibition. One displays the head and shoulders of a woman in nuanced shades of iridescent greyish-blue, enveloped in the serpentine folds of a transparent scarf, exquisitely wreathed and moulded to the forms beneath. But the beautiful central figure has no face and is surrounded by small white screaming heads festooned with scarlet flames against a pale beige background. And the eyes behind the veil are dramatically slanted and startlingly red, a gesture used by Dadang before to symbolise the suffering of humans whose agony is intensified by being made into a spectacle. Where the mouth should be is pixellate symbolising the enforced silence of the victims, imposed by brutality or compelled by shame. On the back of the canvas Dadang has written: ‘Probably not politically correct, but I’m sure it is humanly correct implying that it may be politically correct to forget.'
The report of the fifth worst natural disaster in recorded history, occasioning the deaths of some 230,000 people, 170,000 of them in his own country of Indonesia, in North Sumatra and Aceh, already ravaged by 28 years of struggle for independence. Dadang said that he felt as though he had been struck in the heart. He went immediately to his studio and started painting. The giant work was finished within forty-eight hours. The title expressed his sense of outrage at what he perceived as the treacherous violence of nature. Human beings suffered enough to his mind from the systemic violence of other human beings, without having nature 'stab us in the back'.

The huge sand-coloured painting displays a multitude of complex forms in darker brown encompassing the heads of drowned victims outlined in white, perhaps suggesting the departing souls of those victims. The work has been toured in Southeast Asia and Dadang has been donating other works for the relief of tsunami victims.

But the new painting style is most manifest in The Rivers series 2010. The reference was, as usual, painfully specific: its inspiration is quite precisely the bodies, often decapitated, floating down the Brantas River during the 'Killing Times' of 1965/66, some of the bodies disguised further by the sticks which village children had thrown at them for diversion as they passed by. A young friend of Dadang's in those years recalled how she and other children would also throw coconuts at the floating bodies, not understanding what they were. But the poses of the bodies are languorous, although perhaps accidentally suggesting crucifixion to a viewer familiar with Christian imagery, the details vague and the colours soft and delicate, reflecting Dadang's new resolve to 'represent this terror in a most refined way', if not exactly a 'happier work'.

And terror is indeed represented in the most refined way in the paintings in the series Behind the Veil, created by Dadang for the present exhibition. One displays the head and shoulders of a woman in nuanced shades of iridescent greyish-blue, enveloped in the serpentine folds of a transparent scarf, exquisitely wreathed and moulded to the forms beneath. But the beautiful central figure has no real face and is surrounded by small white screaming heads festooned with scarlet flames against a pale beige background. And the eyes behind the veil are dramatically slanted and startlingly red, a gesture used by Dadang before to symbolise the suffering of humans whose agony is intensified by being made into a spectacle. Where the mouth should be is pixellated, symbolising the enforced silence of the victims, imposed by brutality or compelled by shame. On the back of the canvas Dadang has written: 'Probably not politically correct, but I'm sure it is humanly correct', implying that it may be politically correct to forget, but humanly correct to remember. The irony of the actual title, 'Happy (Chinese) New Year' is tragic. Presidents Wahid and Megawati Sukarnoputri had made it legal to celebrate the Chinese New Year and indeed declared it a national holiday, but they had not presented any apology, let alone recompense, for the victims of racial discrimination. There is also a certain enigmatic quality about another head study, this time with mouth, eyes and ears all pixellated and the white head crowned with a crest of red flames, entitled Ancient me with my head in Flames, symbolising Dadang's developing identification with the victims as he reflects upon and remembers her suffering, recalling an earlier performance in which he had wrapped himself in a veil to symbolise his identification with the victims of rape. Between the two and in a sense 'bridging' them is a more subdued study of a head loosely wrapped in pale brown batik.

Any un instructed viewer encountering these works for the first time might regard them as simply lamenting outrages against women in contemporary society. It would certainly be all too easy to assume a reference to the position of women in some Islamic societies. But it has been noted that it may sometimes be a positive advantage for the casual viewer not to know what has really inspired a work of Dadang's. He is an artist for humanity, after all. But this time he has left no excuse for ignorance: he has insisted that the veil in these paintings has nothing to do with religion; it is rather a wreath of shame, referring to a young Chinese woman traumatised in the terrible violence of the fires and rapes in May 1998, who in consequence 'hated her face and sometimes she didn't want to talk. When they open the veil she wants to censor her eyes, her lips, her nose and hearing, her senses. But when they try to open and see, she won't show all of her face, she would cover her mouth with a little
scarf, and the eyes are very angry in her face ... The pixillation is a form of self-censorship.  

His subject is and always has been the human predicament, which will unfortunately no doubt continue indefinitely to provide new themes for his art. The colours and patterns of Indonesian batik are part of his new series of works, paintings and batiks. While he was growing up in his home village his mother had a shop selling batik. It was from his mother that Dadang learned the 'beauty of batik' and much about art and composition and, in a sense, these works are a tribute to his mother. In his new paintings on batik in this exhibition he explores a narrative of his family and village life and the batiks he uses to paint on are the very humble unsophisticated product of the villagers, used in their everyday life. They show the familiar heads, vivid splashes of red symbolizing fire (at one point his mother’s shop burned in a fire), set against a background of patterned forms, some in bright colours, others shading from pale brown or beige to a cavernous darkness. And in one the foliage is festooned with a forest of eyes, the batiks bearing witness, combining beauty with an evocation of nightmare.

Caroline Turner and Glen Barclay

Api batik Met/lie in May 1998/1989

1. The Art and Human Rights' research project begun in 2000 has had close association with the Research School of Humanities and the ANU. Over four provinces exhibitions (this is the fifth) over 50 artists participated. Research towards this project was in part supported by Australian Research Council Discovery grant 'The Lewis of Taiamane (Carolyn Turner, Margo Neale, Pat Hoile, Jen Weid). The second exhibition was in part supported by the ANU's Asia Pacific Research Futures network. The catalogue from this exhibition can be found on-line at: http://art.anu.edu.au/exhibitions. See Caroline Turner and Nancy Seaver (eds.), Thresholds of Self: Humanities Research Centre, Research School of Humanities, Australian National University, 2003. Pat Hoile and Caroline Turner (eds.), Future Tense: Security and Human Rights, Humanities Research Centre and Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, 2005. Caroline Turner and David Williams (eds.), Thresholds of Self: Humanities Research Centre, Research School of Humanities, and School of Art Gallery, Australian National University, 2007. Nancy Seaver and Caroline Turner (eds.), Becoming (sm: Art and Human Rights, Drill Gallery, Humanities Research Centre, Research School of Humanities, ANU, 2008. Caroline Turner and David Williams (eds.), Humanities Research Centre, Research School of Humanities and School of Art Gallery, Australian National University, 2008.


6. These drawings were made while studying in Yokohama in 1990/81. They form a documentary of life and show scenes of ordinary people for example an old lady playing a gajari and sketches referencing Indonesia’s Hindu and Buddhist histories such as at a museum of Javanese arts and crafts, the famous Prambanan Hindu temple and from the epic Ramayana. Dadang also drew his landscape friends in t-shirts and at art school where he shared a studio with several other young artists.

1. The 'Art and Human Rights' research project begun in 2000 has had a close association with the Research School of Humanities and the Arts at ANU. Over four previous exhibitions (this is the fifth) over 50 artists have participated. Research towards this project was in part supported by an Australian Research Council Discovery grant 'The limits of tolerance' (Carolyn Turner, Marco Nolo, Pat Hoffie, Jon Webb), and the second exhibition was in part supported by the ABC Asia Pacific Research Futures network. The catalogues from these exhibitions can be found on-line at: http://rsc.anu.edu.au/events/exhibitions. See Caroline Turner and Nancy Sever (eds.), Witnessing to Slavery: Art and Human Rights, ANU Drill Hall Gallery, School of Art Gallery and Humanities Research Center, Australian National University, 2003; Pat Hoffie and Caroline Turner (eds.), Future Tense: Security and Human Rights, Humanities Research Centre and Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, 2005; Caroline Turner and David Williams (eds.), Threshold of Tolerance, Humanities Research Centre, Research School of Humanities, and School of Art Gallery, Australian National University, 2007; Nancy Sever and Caroline Turner (eds.), Recovering Lives: Art and Human Rights, Drill Hall Gallery, Humanities Research Center, Research School of Humanities, ANU, 2008 and Caroline Turner and David Williams (eds.), Humanities Research Centre, Research School of Humanities and School of Art Gallery, Australian National University, 2008.


3. The priest's father Tak Fan Pak Tjoe was a small business man. He does not seem to have been a member of the Communist Party which had been legal in Indonesia under Sukarno. For a discussion of the issues see Beneke, R. Anderson and Ruth McNally, What happened in Indonesia?, The New York Review of Books, 25, 3, June 1976, http://www.nybooks. com/articles/9144. (Consulted 14 December 2005); Robert Cribb, (eds.), The Indonesian Killings of 1965-66: Student from Java and Bali, Monash Papers on Southeast Asia, No 21, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, Clayton, 1990.


6. These ideas were made while studying in Yogakarta in 1980/1981. They form a documentary of life and show scenes of ordinary people, for example, an old lady playing a gajaran and sketches referencing Indonesian Hindu and Buddhist holigcal traditions such as ind the museum of Javanese arts and crafts, the famous Prambanan Hindu temple and from the gift Ramazan. Dadaing also drew his bohemian friends in the theatre and at art school where he shared a studio with several other young artists.


8. A fact finding team appointed by the Indonesian Government reported that nearly 1000 people died in the riots, most of them burned to death when triggered by demonstration in supermarkets (Phillips Daily Online 2000). The artist began the performance by weeping slowly among the figures, in his characteristic performance role at semi-trance, kneeling in respect to each figure as if a priest or in prayer before, with great reverence, setting the figures alight one by one. The audience remained in almost complete silence, many in tears, and as the television documentary revealed, in the flames took hold (IBC 1990). The finals of the figures remained fixed on the poles as the bodies melted and collapsed in the flames. This and other performances are described in further detail in Caroline Turner, 'Wounds in Our Heart: Identity and Social Justice in the Art of So Dadaing Christanto', in Kathryn Robinson (ed.), Asian and Pacific Crosscurrents: Self and Subject in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, New York, 2000, pp.77-98.


13. The title refers to the screening process under the Sukarno regime for those who carried the stigma of association with those arrested in 1965/66. The work has been performed several times in Canberra, Sydney, Brisbane, Indonesia and New Zealand, sometimes with the artist alone or with others as in 2004 at the Australian National University with his son and his son's young friend Niau Setanggir Turner also taking part.


16. Melvise Erbatur has described the performance of Maolu in the North at the National Gallery of Australia in 2004. Dadaing Christanto began the performance kneeling by the edge of the sculpture garden's Marika Pool, burning folded sheets of gold and silver leaf paper in a bowl until the vessel filled with ash. He then secured his face with the ashes... He then walked into the water, where his sculpture was installed (a bronze locust) and 'weave his way between the hearts, reminding them and mourning victims of the tragedy', Melvise Erbatur in the Public Domain: Dadaing Christanto, 'Washing the wound', ToASA Review, vol 17, 16, p.24.


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Jackie Menzies and Natalee Seitz at the Art Gallery of New South Wales
Rachel Egginton, Harry Wye, Melinda Sung, Michelle McGinness (for the filming of earlier performances)
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Audio Visual Services at ANU

DADANG CHRISTANTO: WOUNDS IN OUR HEART
12 NOVEMBER - 19 DECEMBER 2010
Exhibition curated by Caroline Turner

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