The political in the poetic : an alternative reading of the Jendela Art Group's nascent years (1997-2003)

Nor Jumaiyah Mohamed Khamsin

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**THE POLITICAL IN THE POETIC:
AN ALTERNATIVE READING OF THE
JENDELA ART GROUP'S NASCENT YEARS (1997-2003)**

NOR JUMAIYAH BINTE MOHAMED KHAM SIN

School of Art, Design And Media

A thesis submitted to the
Nanyang Technological University
in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of
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Nor Jumaiyah Binte Mohamed Khamsin

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	11
ABSTRACT.....	13
TABLE OF FIGURES	15
CHAPTER 1	17
THESIS STATEMENT.....	17
BACKGROUND.....	21
LITERATURE REVIEW	26
METHODOLOGY	36
THESIS STRUCTURE.....	43
CHAPTER 2	46
THE POLITICAL IN THE POETIC.....	46
POETIC CONTEXTS AND INFLUENCES OF JENDELA	57
POLITICAL CONTEXTS OF EARLY REFORMASI INDONESIA	68
CHAPTER 3	75
CORETAN (TRANSIENT LINES)	75
HANDIWIRMAN SAPUTRA <i>UNTITLED LANDSCAPE</i>	80
YUNIZAR SURAT PERINTAH (<i>WARRANT LETTER</i>)	85
CHAPTER 4	89
BAYANGAN BENTUK (ALLUSION OF FORM)	89
RUDI MANTOFANI MENJARING KEYAKINAN (SUSPENSION OF BELIEF)	93
HANDIWIRMAN SAPUTRA <i>PATAH HATI (BROKEN HEART)</i>	97
HANDIWIRMAN SAPUTRA <i>KIRI BARU (THE NEW LEFT)</i>	101
CHAPTER 5	104
JIWA KETOK (VISIBLE SOUL)	104
JUMALDI ALFI <i>PENCARI KETENANGAN (PEACE SEEKER)</i>	108
HANDIWIRMAN SAPUTRA <i>DUDUK/BERDIRI (SIT/STAND) AND DUA TANGAN (TWO HANDS)</i>	115
CHAPTER 6	121
CONCLUSION	121
ILLUSTRATIONS	133
APPENDIX A: ARTISTS BIOGRAPHIES.....	147
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	151
BIBLIOGRAPHY	155

ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses the hitherto overlooked political significance of the early poetical art of Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela (KSRJ), or Jendela Art Group, one of Indonesia's most prominent art collectives during the Reformasi era. I examine how Jendela constructs a poetical art language for their work and uses this visual and aesthetic language to create art which engages emotion, invites reflection and inspires imagination. This is significant, I suggest, as it highlights the artist's lived experiences, perspectives, and observations of Indonesian society during a time of political transformations and social changes. I combine original research drawn from my fieldwork and artist interviews to examine and interpret a selection of Jendela's artworks to show the political resonances emerging from the interactions between their poetical art and the political conditions of the time, and show how Jendela's poetical art works with emotion, intuition, and imagination to articulate political concerns and experiences.

This thesis proposes the 'the political in the poetic' as an interpretive device to present an alternative perspective of the group, to demonstrate how they did not shun the socio-political realities of their time but instead made their opinions and deliberations felt through poetic works of art in the thematic chapters of *Coretan (Transient Lines)*, *Bayangan Bentuk (Allusion of Form)*, and *Jiwa Ketok (Visible Soul)*. The political refers to the time and place – Yogyakarta during Reformasi, while the poetic refers to the group's poetic sensibilities inspired by their Minangkabau culture. In combining the political with the poetic, I present a strategy and overarching framework for discussing and claiming the political resonance of Jendela's poetic artworks produced during their formative years, while not disclaiming the group's aesthetic and artistic values.

TABLE OF FIGURES

- Figure 1. The Jendela Art Group: Handiwirman Saputra, Jumaldi Alfi, Rudi Mantofani, Yusra Martunus, Yunizar and Mohammad Irfan, 1999. In *Jendela: From a Window*, page 16, Bali: Hotel Padma, 1999. Image courtesy of Tony Godfrey. 17
- Figure 2. Rudi Mantofani, “Tarik Mimpi (Pulled Dream),” 2002, Acrylic on canvas, 200 x 120 cm. In *Rudi Mantofani Cakrawala Ganda*, page 5, Jakarta: Nadi Gallery, 2002. Image courtesy of IVAA. 50
- Figure 3. Handiwirman Saputra, “Untitled,” 1998, Oil on canvas, 145 x 195 cm. In *The Philip Morris Group of Companies: ASEAN Art Awards 1998*, Hanoi: Hanoi Fine Arts College and Ho Chi Minh Fine Arts Museum, 1998. Image courtesy of Gajah Gallery Singapore. 80
- Figure 4. Yunizar, “Surat Perintah (Warrant Letter),” 1999, Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 95 cm. In Sotheby’s Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Paintings Sale, 6 October 2008. Image from: <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.805.html/2>. (Accessed 20 July 2019). 86
- Figure 5. Rudi Mantofani, “Menjaring Keyakinan (Suspension of Belief),” 2000, Plastic, stainless steel, 300 x 300 cm. In *Jendela: Membuka Kemungkinan (Jendela: Opening Possibilities)*, page 22, Yogyakarta: Purna Budaya and Jakarta: Galarie Cipta II TIM, 2000. Image courtesy of Gajah Gallery Singapore. 96
- Figure 6. Handiwirman Saputra, “Patah Hati (Broken Hearted),” 2001, Wood, thread, copper, dimensions variable. In *Jendela: Estaticus Mundi*, page 12, Bandung: Selesar Sunaryo, 2002. Image courtesy of Gajah Gallery Singapore. 97
- Figure 7. Handiwirman Saputra, “Kiri Baru (The New Left),” 1999, Mixed media on canvas, 130 x 150 cm. In *Handiwirman Saputra: Saat Bentuk Menjadi Kelakuan (The Moment when Form becomes Action)*, page 65, Tokyo: Nadi Gallery, 2015. Image courtesy of Gajah Gallery Singapore. 101
- Figure 8.1. Jumaldi Alfi, “Pencari Ketenangan (Peace Seeker),” 2003, Oil on canvas, 70 x 70 cm each, Triptych. In *Alfi*, page 58-60, Yogyakarta: 2008. Image courtesy of author. 111
- Figure 8.2 and 8.3. Jumaldi Alfi, “Pencari Ketenangan (Peace Seeker),” 2003, Oil on canvas, 70 x 70 cm each, Triptych. In *Alfi*, page 58-60, Yogyakarta: 2008. Image courtesy of author. 112
- Figure 9. Handiwirman Saputra, “Duduk/Berdiri (Sit/Stand),” 1999, Mixed media on canvas, 150 x 130 cm. In *Handiwirman Saputra: Saat Bentuk Menjadi Kelakuan (The Moment when Form becomes Action)*, page 63, Tokyo: Nadi Gallery, 2015. Image courtesy of Tony Godfrey. 117
- Figure 10. Handiwirman Saputra, “Dua Tangan (Two Hands),” 1999, Mixed media on canvas, 150 x 130 cm. In *Jendela: From a Window*, page 9, Bali: Hotel Padma, 1999. Image courtesy of Gajah Gallery Singapore. 120

CHAPTER 1

Thesis Statement

Figure 1. The Jendela Art Group: Handiwirman Saputra, Jumaldi Alfi, Rudi Mantofani, Yusra Martunus, Yunizar and Mohammad Irfan, 1999. In *Jendela: From a Window*, page 16, Bali: Hotel Padma, 1999. Image courtesy of Tony Godfrey.

This thesis examines how the *political* and *poetic* intertwine in the early works of one of Indonesia's most prominent art collectives, Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela (KSRJ), or Jendela Art Group (Jendela), during Indonesia's Reformasi period.¹ This study discusses how Jendela's poetic sensibilities and aesthetic strategies in creating artworks during its nascent years from 1997 to 2003 (which coincide with Reformasi's early phase) are situated within and emergent from Indonesia's cultural and social contexts of the time. Jendela's early works are distinct from many of their

¹ Edwin Jurriëns' 2009 book *From Monologue to Dialogue: Radio and Reform in Indonesia* defines Reformasi as a socio-political process aimed at ending malpractices associated with Suharto's New Order regime; the popular acronym KKN stands for 'korupsi, kolusi dan nepotisme' ('corruption, collusion and nepotism'). Reformasi sought to introduce social, political, economic and cultural reform towards a more open and democratic society. The urge for reform was strengthened by the economic crisis that had severely hit Indonesia and the rest of Southeast Asia since mid-1997. (Jurriëns 2009, 9).

Yogyakarta peers' polemical and politically charged works of the time, which highlighted social commentary and political action.² Instead of political or social discourse, Jendela's works from their formative years reveal and emphasise the complexity of individual experience amidst a changing society, and are often criticised as being politically insignificant or apolitical.³

This thesis presents an alternative position and reading to these views, and proposes how these works possess dimensions of political significance which have not been studied or appreciated extensively in existing literature. To do so, this thesis advances and applies an interpretive framework – the *political in the poetic* – to locate the political resonances present in the poetic sensibilities of Jendela's early artworks. This framework affords an appreciation of how Jendela's artistic decisions are situated within, and emerge from, Reformasi Indonesia's social and political conditions, as well as the different bodies of cultural knowledge and expression constituting and influencing the habitus of Indonesian artists.⁴

This framework also emphasises how the poetic sensibilities in Jendela's early artworks express and interweave two themes of political resonance. Firstly, this

² Jendela's inaugural exhibition in 1997, staged in Yogyakarta just at the cusp of Reformasi in 1998, was concurrent with the formation of several artists' collectives such as Apotik Komik in 1997, Taring Padi in 1998 and mes56 in 2002. The aforementioned art groups contemporaneous with Jendela actively engaged with local political and societal content to produce art in ephemeral media such as photography, video screening, performance, public art, street art and social engagement collectively. (Dermawan 2010, 16).

³ In his essay *Melongok ke Dalam Jendela (Seeing Through the Window)* Enin Supriyanto spoke of how Jendela's "socio-cultural background and place of origin" was an issue in the "debates of Indonesian contemporary art in the late 1990s." Consequently, it resulted in opinions that Jendela's "works were seen to be the antithesis of trends in Indonesian contemporary art, particularly in Yogyakarta, during the 1990s characterised by works with 'socio-political' content or a certain visual approach, whether if it was 'Yogya Surrealism' or 'Yogya Expressionism'." (Supriyanto 2015, 236).

⁴ Here I refer to Jendela's ethnic origins as documented in Katherine L. Bruhn's "Community and the Rantau: West Sumatran Artists in Indonesia's Art World," *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary Modern Art in Asia*, Volume 2, Number 1(2018), 119. "The Minangkabau or *Minang* known as people indigenous to the highlands of West Sumatra, Indonesia. Recognised as the world's largest matrilineal Muslim society and a tradition of male-out migration known as *merantau*, *Minangs* have throughout history, resulted in a significant contribution to Indonesia's intellectual, political and cultural history. In contemporary art, Minangkabau artistic prowess is dominated by artists of Jendela."

investigation examines Jendela's identity politics as Minang artists in a Javanese-centric landscape of art and discourse, and discusses how Jendela's visual language is inspired by the poetics of Minangkabau culture rather than Javanese-centric conventions of political art. This study argues through this poetic sensibility of emphasising the inner world of individual experiences and allusions over the outer world of social commentary and revolutionary polemics, Jendela was able to subtly assert notions of their identities - who they are, and what they do - within the revolutionary art stronghold of Yogyakarta. Through this artistic strategy, Jendela exercised artistic agency and defined their own identity of practice as politically distinct and separate from their peers in the Javanese-centric movements of Reformasi Indonesia. During a time of political upheaval, as artists became increasingly associated with clarion calls for revolution and reform, Jendela was able to navigate their identity in a different political resonance, and express their collective identity and distinct position on their own terms.

Secondly, this study argues Jendela's early artworks, which focus on the quotidian subject matter of Indonesian life rather than on dramatic moments in Indonesian history, subvert political and social norms in a demonstration of artistic autonomy. Through poetic enquiries on daily life and ordinary objects, this thesis argues Jendela was able to simultaneously express their unique worldview in an atmosphere of transformation, engender novel perspectives to observe and question broader social structures and systems, and examine how these unseen forces conditioned life at large in Reformasi Indonesia.

It is important to highlight that the terms political and poetic of this thesis are to infer that the aesthetics of Jendela's early works did possess political resonances despite criticism that the collective was apolitical or politically insignificant. The term political reference the place and time conditioning Jendela's practice, which is the city of Yogyakarta in a period of political transformation known as Reformasi.

Meanwhile, the poetic refers to the group's aesthetics inspired by the poetic culture of their habitus of Western Sumatra. This is important to highlight for Jendela's poetic works distinct from the dominance of politically charged, polemical art Yogyakarta is a point of tension in this thesis which shall be argued as politically loaded. So, within the poetic which refer to the aesthetics of Jendela, this thesis aims to make the case that there are political resonances, and that would be its contribution to the scholarship on Jendela. As a point of clarification, the title is neither a point of departure for a theoretical explanation on the terms of the political and the poetic, nor to produce a master's on these concepts."

To accomplish these objectives, this study undertakes an analysis of several of Jendela's early artworks, guided by the discovery of new primary material and informed by numerous interviews, which both offer intriguing insights not present in existing literature. Through these analyses, this study demonstrates how these artworks contain political resonances of collective agency that can "challenge both artistic identity and authorship."⁵ In particular, this study examines a selection of works in three key metaphors to discuss the political in the poetic. These are presented in the following thesis chapters: *Coretan (Transient Lines)* (Chapter 3) shows how Jendela emulates and expresses lines to comment on tensions of the time; *Bayangan Bentuk (Allusion of Form)* (Chapter 4) discusses how Jendela draws upon material and form loaded with everyday social experience; and *Jiwa Ketok (Visible Soul)* (Chapter 5) explores the representations of the body as a metaphor to mirror the era's anxieties, uncertainties and realities.

This thesis argues these artworks are responses to specific times or situations where Jendela might "run the risk of being swallowed up into the very systems

⁵ Maria Lind, "The Collaborative Turn," in *Taking the Matter into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices* (London, UK: Black Dog Publishing, 2007), 16-17. In making this point, Lind cited the examples of artist collectives such as the artist guilds of Rubens, Baroque to Surrealists group experiments and Andy Warhol's pseudo-industrial factory.

against which they are reacting.”⁶ This thesis also suggests Jendela, by not compromising their identities and attitudes, and by consolidating their aesthetics and practice as a collective, was able to achieve artistic agency and autonomy despite their anomalous status within the political environs of Yogyakarta’s art world.

Background

The Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela (KSRJ) or Jendela Art Group is a collective of five artists: co-founders Jumaldi Alfi (b.1975) and Handiwirman Saputra (b.1975), and members Rudi Mantofani (b.1973), Yunizar (b.1971) and Yusra Martunus (b.1973).⁷ Originally from Sumatra, they formed in 1993 in Yogyakarta, and have become one of Indonesia’s most prominent contemporary art collectives noted for their formal purity employing poetic wit to expose deeper meanings behind objects.⁸ They met as students at Yogyakarta’s Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI) in 1993, where Jumaldi and Yunizar were painting majors, Rudi and Yusra were sculpture majors, and Handiwirman specialised in wood and metalcraft. The biographies of Jendela artists can be referred to in Appendix A.

Jendela literally means ‘window’ in the Indonesian language. As such, the name operates in a metaphorical capacity to generate numerous imaginative viewpoints. A window delineates the threshold between interior and exterior, private and public, and yet such boundaries can be crossed by the mere act of looking; a window permits the passage of light, but denies physical access. It is also a term with dual connotations of entry and escape. It is in such semantic and symbolic complexities that the ethos of Jendela was founded and developed in their poetic

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The group numbered six members when it formed in 1993. In 2002 however, June Yap noted the absence of one of its members, Mohammad Irfan, in the group’s exhibition in her review of “A Play of the Ordinary”, published in *Asian Art News*, June 2009, 97-99.

⁸ Both institutional and commercial venues such as the NUS Museum, Arndt, Singapore Tyler Print Institute, and Valentine Willie gallery have featured the group in past exhibitions between 2009 and 2013.

sensibilities derived from their Minangkabau culture. The Minangkabau or *Minang* are people indigenous to the West Sumatran highlands of Indonesia and are recognised as the world's largest matrilineal Muslim society. Through a tradition of male-out migration known as *merantau*, *Minangs* have made significant contributions to Indonesia's intellectual, political and cultural history.⁹

Significantly, Jendela's emergence coincided with the crossroads of history, during a major political upheaval in Indonesia that witnessed the end of three decades of authoritarian rule by Suharto's New Order regime, and the advent of the Reformasi period, marked by socio-political reforms aimed at ending corrupt malpractices and introducing social, political, economic and cultural transformations towards a more open and democratic society.¹⁰ These urges for reform were strengthened by the 1997 economic crisis that severely hit Indonesia and the rest of Southeast Asia, and Reformasi's liberated atmosphere heralded a flourishing arts scene thriving on its newfound freedom of expression.¹¹

However, unlike many of their artistic contemporaries, Jendela did not focus on making overtly political works, but instead explored the ordinary and expressed the everyday. For this approach, they were criticised by independent art critics and journalists who felt contemporary art from Yogyakarta should be politically charged.¹² Nevertheless, they enjoyed early commercial success through the

⁹ Katherine L. Bruhn, "Community and the Rantau: West Sumatran Artists in Indonesia's Art World," *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary Modern Art in Asia*, Volume 2, Number 1(2018): 119.

¹⁰ Edwin Jurriëns, *From Monologue to Dialogue: Radio and Reform in Indonesia* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 9.

¹¹ Susan Ingham, "Indonesian Art, Entering the Global," in *Contemporaneity: Contemporary Art in Indonesia*, ed. Biljana Ciric (Shanghai: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010), 80-88.

¹² Mashadi, Ahmad, Enin Supriyanto, introduction to *Jendela: A Play of the Ordinary*, by National University of Singapore Museum (Singapore: NUS Museum, 2009), 1-2.

patronage and influence of Dr Oei Hong Djien, one of Indonesia's most influential art collectors.¹³

Though Jendela first met in 1993 as students who arrived from West Sumatra to pursue further studies at Yogyakarta's Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI), this study shall begin in 1997 for two reasons. Firstly, 1997 marks the year of their first exhibition, Jendela's debut as a collective with a corpus of works which signified a crystallisation of their aesthetic ethos that focused on the quotidian subject matter of Indonesian life through poetic enquiries on daily life and ordinary objects.

Secondly, the year 1997 marked the start of a particularly interesting period that followed due to the larger socio-political backdrop against which Jendela created and exhibited their art. It was an intense and exciting period in Indonesian art when Jendela emerged in Yogyakarta during a politically transformative era of Reformasi, marked by the fall of President Suharto in 1998 that ended three decades of authoritarian period known as *Order Baru* or New Order. Yogyakarta was described as a hotbed for new artists' groups who seized the opportunity to exercise their newfound freedom and express "novel orientations on how social, cultural and political lives should take."¹⁴ Instead of political or social discourse, Jendela's works from their formative years reveal and emphasise the complexity of individual experience amidst a changing society. Therefore, framing this study during this period aims to illuminate what bearing did the larger historical, socio-political context conditioning Jendela's early years would have on the group's artistic

¹³ Agung Hujatnikajennong's paper *The Contemporary Turns: Indonesian Contemporary Art*, gives an overview of Indonesia's growing prominence internationally in contemporary art. In the post-Cold War global situation, he argues, the dissolution of the hegemonic Euro-America-centric modernist paradigm gave rise to the decentralisation and remapping of the international art scene. In turn this 'new internationalisation' became eventually interchangeable with 'biennalisation', a new model of global patronage of contemporary art. The inauguration of the Asia-Pacific Triennale in 1993 at Queensland Art Gallery and the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in 1995, were two of the earliest international platforms to present contemporary art of Indonesia. (Hujatnikajennong 2011, 71).

¹⁴Ade Dermawan, "Fixing the Chain of Ideas," in *Exhibition of Alternative Spaces and Art Groups in Indonesia*, ed. Ardi Yunanto (Jakarta: North Art Space, 2010), 14-19.

production, reception and critique. Their early works also reveal a stronger cross-influence in style and subject matter between the artists that created the collective identity of Jendela as a functioning unit. By the time the group had their first gallery exhibitions at Nadi Gallery, Jakarta in 2005, stronger individual styles had become apparent. As interviews with the artists suggest the sense of collaboration had somehow dissipated around 2003, and that is why my study ends there.

This thesis also examines Jendela from a different perspective by focusing and building on the scholarship of experts in the field of contemporary art who curated the group's exhibitions. They are Soewardi in 1997, Mamanoor in 2000, Agung Hujatnikajennong in 2002, Rizki A. Zaelani in 2005, Enin Supriyanto in 2007, Ahmad Mashadi in 2009, and Grace Samboh in 2012.¹⁵ In addition, I have built on the studies of Minangkabau culture in the realm of visual arts conducted by the late Professor Jeffrey Hadler and Katherine Bruhn, both from the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies from UC Berkeley. Towards this objective, I have benefitted from the unpublished interview transcripts between Jendela and art historian Tony Godfrey in 2009¹⁶, and from my own fieldwork conducted in Indonesia from 31 November to 2 December 2019 when I interviewed members of Jendela: Jumaldi Alfi, Handiwirman Saputra, Rudi Mantofani and Yunizar.¹⁷

¹⁵ Jendela's group exhibitions are: "Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela (The Jendela Art Group)," Purna Budaya, Yogyakarta in 1997; "From a Window," Hotel Padma, Bali in 1999; "Membuka Kemungkinan (Opening Possibilities)," Purna Budaya, Yogyakarta and Galeri Cipta II, Taman Ismail Marzuki, Jakarta in 2000; "Estaticus Mundi," Selesar Sunaryo, Bandung in 2002; "Biasa (Ordinary)," Nadi Gallery, Jakarta in 2005; "Cilukba (Peekaboo)," Valentine Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur in 2007; "Jendela A Play of the Ordinary," National University Singapore Museum, Singapore in 2009 and "The Window of Jendela," Oei Hong Djien Museum, Magelang in 2012.

¹⁶ This unpublished transcripts from interviews conducted with Jendela in 2009 was kindly provided by Tony Godfrey after a chance meeting with the art historian at Art Philippines in 2017 in Manila where he was based. This set of interviews were conducted for a publication project commissioned by a private gallery.

¹⁷ Only four of the six members will be discussed here, for Yusra Martunus was unresponsive when contacted for interview requests and M. Irfan had already exited the group since the first show.

To conclude, the thesis rethinks the formative years of this group within the context of Indonesian society and politics at a transformative moment of Indonesian history. I draw upon the direct input of the artists in question with whom I have discussed these matters at length. Secondly, I suggest a new trajectory for the way Jendela's practice and artworks can be discussed by curators, art historians and critics. Earlier attempts located their aesthetic sensibility either within the poetic culture of their Minangkabau roots, or in the larger context of contemporary Indonesian art. Though both types of discourse provide a contextual view of Jendela's practice, they reveal little of the artists' motivations and processes for making poetic works of art at a period of grave political tension. By interviewing the artists themselves, I have attempted to fill this scholarly gap.¹⁸

Lastly, it is timely to reappraise the significance of Jendela and its relationship with the political in view of the recent international attention directed towards Ruangrupa, the collective from Indonesia who will offer the first curatorial leadership from Asia at the helm of Documenta 15 in Kassel, Germany in 2022.¹⁹ The significance of Indonesian collectives to bring forth new artistic attitudes that galvanise the social, political and cultural spheres of a locale are key ideas in developing my argument for the political and the poetic of Jendela.

¹⁸ This is an ongoing interest and I am fortunate to be allowed access to the artists who have been forthcoming on speaking on such matters. These interviews are unprecedented in the existing scholarship, and I feel the interviews will give this thesis its stamp of originality.

¹⁹ Andrew Russeth, "Ruangrupa Artist Collective Picked to Curate Documenta 15," ARTnews, accessed 01 July 2020, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/market/ruangrupa-picked-as-artistic-director-of-documenta-15-11953/>. According to Philippe Pirotte, a member of Documenta's selection committee, Ruangrupa was selected because "they had demonstrated the ability to appeal to various communities, including groups that go beyond pure art audiences, and to promote local commitment and participation."

Literature Review

Jendela's practice has been discussed along two distinct trajectories by curators, art historians and critics. The first is focused on the correlation between the group's formal properties of art with the proverbial culture of their Minangkabau roots, while the second debates and evaluates the criticality of the group's practice within the larger context of contemporary Indonesian art with socio-political engagement as the yardstick. Presented here as well are a selection of key points based on academic sources that explore the relationship between the political, politics with art, aesthetics or the poetic. So that prior discussions on Jendela based on the themes of the political and poetic could be somewhat understood within established ideas. Identification of these established ideas in the literature review would then be further developed into an interpretive framework based on the themes of the political and the poetic to guide this thesis.

Let us first look at these two existing trajectories of discussion. Jendela's Minangkabau identity has been the focus of numerous accounts by curators.²⁰ For example, Rizki A. Zaelani remarked,

The group is considered as a form of an antithesis – and even 'exotically valuable' – only because it is taken to be 'different', particularly in comparison with a large number of artists in Yogyakarta where the artists are based. Until today, the group has never stated its position and orientation openly. That way, its 'existence' springs from other people positioning, questioning, and judging the group.²¹

²⁰ Katherine Bruhn's 2018 essay, *Landscape Legacies: Visualising Alam Minangkabau* refers to Agung Hujanikajennong, "Wancana dan Rindu," in *Estaticus Mundi* (Bandung: Selesar Sunaryo, 2002); Rizki A. Zaelani, "Biasa Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela, Kini," in *Biasa* (Jakarta: Nadi Gallery, 2005); and Enin Supriyanto, "Melongok ke dalam Jendela," in *Susudah Aktivisme: Sepilihan Esai Seni Rupa 1994-2015*, ed. Grace Samboh (Indonesia: Hyphen, 2015). (Bruhn 2018, 38).

²¹ Rizki A. Zaelani, "Biasa, Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela, Kini (The Ordinary, Jendela Art Group, Today)" in *Biasa (Ordinary)*, (Jakarta: Nadi Gallery, 2005), 14.

Mamanoor argued the artistic merits of Jendela's practice should not be judged narrowly by the artists' ethnicity, as their works do not present any explicit primordial attributes. He acknowledged such sentiments could have arisen because the collective was seen as insulating themselves as a community of West Sumatran artists within a Javanese stronghold of Yogyakarta.²² Soewardi expressed his concerns about their formal explorations in the realm of the senses and predicted a symbolic battlefield against the currents of political art in Yogyakarta. Soewardi said,

They speak of their own inner world, a stance that is somewhat opposed to the current (perhaps) if we align this latter tendency in favour of social and even political issues into the main choice of artists (especially young and academic) as the legitimate theme in expression.²³

Agung Hujatnikajennong commented,

This very basic problem is indeed very possible to be faced even by socio-political artists whose work had been confronted with the tendency that Jendela artists intending, namely the problem of expressing language. It is also one of the important points that the dichotomy between the social-political art and the non-representational works of art cannot be separated from the politics of meaning.²⁴

²² Mamanoor, "Segar di Dadah (A Breath of Fresh Air)" in *Membuka Kemungkinan (Opening up Possibilities)*, (Yogyakarta: Purna Budaya and Jakarta: Galeri Cipta II, Taman Ismail Marzuki, 2000), 7.

²³ Soewardi, "Sebuah Ungkapan Dunia Personal (Sayings from a Personal World)" in *Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela (Jendela Art Group)*, (Yogyakarta: Purna Budaya, 1997), 6.

²⁴ Agung Hujatnikajennong, "Wancana Benci dan Rindu (A Discourse of Love and Hate)" in *Estaticus Mundi* (Bandung: Selesar Sunaryo and Jakarta: Air Art House, 2002), 7.

From these statements, it appears Jendela's identity as Minang artists in the Javanese art world of Yogyakarta had dominated critical perspectives about their art and reception. On a second tangent, art critics in Indonesia regarded the non-representational visual elements of Jendela's works as non-critical because it did not obviously express socio-political concerns. In his review of *Membuka Kemungkinan (Opening Possibilities)*, Raihul Fadjiri noted how Jendela's practice as "Contemporary art is trapped in the 'art of communication' as a contextual trumpet. However, recently, the antithesis of representational features has emerged among young artists whose work has no relation to the social context."²⁵ Writing for *Tempo*, Agus Dermawan noted with concern how, "this line of works deliberately erases one's identity...they only borrowed the art language of other nations...to express their own artistic thoughts."²⁶ Putu Fajar's review of the exhibition *Biasa (Ordinary)* for *Kompas* concluded that the "message-less and 'quiet' nature of the works have yet to reach a point of resolution that may affirm Jendela's place in Yogyakarta's art scene."²⁷ Ahmad has insisted the inadequacy of such a critique of Jendela's formal and conceptual positions that is framed by a narrow outlook asserting the singularity of Yogyakarta art as a conceptual proposition.²⁸

Challenging such polarising opinions of Jendela's practice are alternative viewpoints offering more nuanced perspectives of Jendela's seemingly apolitical practice. Mamanoor commented on how "it may be the biases of local frenzy that is often used as a discourse in the framework of interpreting the plurality and

²⁵ Raihul Fadjiri, "Anti-thesis Seni Rupa Kontermporer (Anti-thesis of Contemporary Art)," *Tempo*, 14 May 2000.

²⁶ Agus Dermawan T, "Seni Rupa yang Mengutang dan Bermuatan (Contemporary Art that is Indebted and Formidable)," *Kompas*, 11 June 2000.

²⁷ Putu Fajar, "KSRJ – Air Merebas di Balik Tembok (KSRJ – Water that Seeps Behind the Wall)," *Kompas*, 24 July 2005.

²⁸ Ahmad Mashadi, "Jendela: Aspects of Debates and Art History," in *Jendela: A Play of the Ordinary*, National University of Singapore Museum, ed. Ahmad Mashadi and Enin Supriyanto (Singapore: NUS Museum, 2009), 6.

multicultural tendencies of international relations.”²⁹ Mamanoor felt the political resonances of Yogyakarta might have resulted in a biased reading of Jendela. Since Jendela’s attitudes did not conform to the expectations of what political art should be, it has often been dismissed entirely. Asikin Hasan’s review of the exhibition *Estaticus Mundi* in *Tempo* suggested “the political traumas of the PRRI-Permesta Rebellion that once struck West Sumatra, and the influence of Communism in social realism art, make political activism a difficult endeavour in the hometowns of Jendela.”³⁰ Rizki A. Zaelani, curator of *Biasa (Ordinary)*, proposed instead of reading Jendela through the prism of Yogyakarta art, the key to deciphering the collective could lie, ironically, in examining the subjectivity of the artist.³¹ Enin observed Jendela, like many of the generation of artists emerging during Reformasi, were disenchanted with the euphoria of Reformasi and chose not to create “heroic works”, concentrating instead on the creation of a new aesthetic code.³² Enin’s views are echoed in my interview with the artists in 2019 who said they were not oblivious or apathetic to the socio-political tragedy unfolding around them, but rather wished to define their practice distinctively from their contemporaries as a new, emerging collective.

The aforementioned discussions had shown emerging viewpoints that Jendela’s early works possess a political dimension based on the contexts conditioning their formative years. Critics view that Jendela as non-critical because it did not engage directly or present explicit socio-political content in comparison with the group’s Yogyakarta peers. On the other hand, scholars viewed the

²⁹ Mamanoor, “Segar di Dadah (A Breath of Fresh Air)” in *Membuka Kemungkinan (Opening up Possibilities)*, (Yogyakarta: Purna Budaya and Jakarta: Galeri Cipta II, Taman Ismail Marzuki, 2000), 7.

³⁰ Asikin Hasan, “Dari Jendela (From a Window),” *Tempo*, July 2002.

³¹ Rizki A. Zaelani, “Biasa, Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela, Kini (The Ordinary, Jendela Art Group, Today)” in *Biasa (Ordinary)*, (Jakarta: Nadi Gallery, 2005), 15.

³² Enin Supriyanto, “Melongok ke Dalam Jendela (Seeing Through the Window)” in *Sesudah Aktivisme: Sepilipan Esai Seni Rupa 1994-2015 (After Activism: Selection of essays 1994-2015)*, ed. Grace Sambuh (Indonesia: Hyphen, 2015), 198.

misunderstanding of Jendela could be due to the group's non-polemical, poetical art and cultural identity that did not conform to popular views of what critical art from Yogyakarta should be. Therefore, the above discussions are rich grounds to develop this thesis argument embedded in the relationship of two key themes: the political and the poetic. To make sense of this relationship between politics, political with art, aesthetics and the poetic that shall be developed into an interpretive framework in chapter two, this literature review shall first discuss published ideas by Roland Bleiker, Sandra Faulkner, Jacques Rancière, Gabriel Rockhill and Toni Ross.

Noting that Jendela's early years were entrenched in the tumultuous political era of Reformasi, this thesis turns to Roland Bleiker's *Aesthetics and World Politics* on the importance of aesthetics in a time of political conflict and change. Bleiker proposes that aesthetics could be a meaningful interpretive mechanism with the potential to engender new ways of looking and thinking about the political,

Aesthetic sources can offer us alternative insights into international relations; a type of reflective understanding that emerges not from systematically applying technical skills of analysis which prevail in social sciences, but from cultivating a more open-ended level of sensibility about the political. We might then be able to appreciate what we otherwise cannot even see: perspectives and people excluded from prevailing purviews, for instance, or the emotional nature and consequences of political events.³⁴

To advance the author's understanding of Bleiker's proposition that aesthetics can cultivate new perspectives towards the political because "persons excluded from prevailing purviews" can participate for it engages the whole register of human perceptions and sensations and not only practices of reason and logos that prevail in conventional scholarship, this thesis looks towards Sandra Faulkner's *Poetic Inquiry as Social Justice and Political Response*, a volume of writings by various authors that

³⁴ Roland Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan 2009), 2.

reflects on poetic inquiry as a method to critique power structures. According to Faulkner, though a fixed definition of poetic inquiry does not exist, it is described as “a method of turning research interviews, transcripts, observations, personal experience, and reflections into poems or poetic forms” and “can be a response to political and social events, used as a pedagogical tool to critique inequitable social structures, and speak to our local identities and politics”. For Faulkner, poetic forms are an alternative and meaningful way “to re-present the human experience in a more approachable, powerful, emotionally poignant and accurate form than prose research reports allow.” Faulkner elaborates,

The poetic inquiry movement offers a contribution to a developing body of evidence that is not merely a third-person perspective, as in conventional evidence, but is also intimate with first and second perspectives and is thus a fertile pathway to ethical, caring, and emphatic work. In reading or listening to a poem we are bearing witness to the other, to the person writing the poem, or to the situation that is the subject of the poem and this is fundamental part of caring work.³⁵

Keeping in mind how Faulkner’s points could resonate with the political dimensions of Jendela’s anomaly status in Yogyakarta due to the group’s cultural identity, selected here are examples of poets who employ identity as a concept to address politically tinged issues such as place, race and belonging. First, Heidi Van Rooyen’s found and generated poems tackling the “contextual, emotional and psychological experience of coloredness”, a contested and disenfranchised identity that is still unravelling in South Africa post-Apartheid, a period of nationwide institutionalised racial segregation that lasted from 1948 until the early 1990s. Van Rooyen refers to poetic forms as a creative avenue that privileges the speaker voice and taps into

³⁵ Sandra L. Faulkner, *Poetic Inquiry as Social Justice and Political Response*, (Delaware: Vernon Press 2019), ix.

experiences for unrestrained expression. This is a crucial process for negating racial stereotypes “affirming poetic inquiry’s role in reclamation.”³⁶

Secondly, the poetic work of John J. Guiney Yallop speaks of his indigenous identity through the use of poetry as a “personal journey to discovery, reclamation, and integration of marginalized identities.” Expressing oneself poetically had also enabled Yallop to process his reality and challenges experiencing homophobia as a youth and into his adult years. Where poetic expression could not serve justice, it enabled an understanding of the injustices underlined by “bigotry, prejudice and simple ignorance worn comfortably.”³⁷ Both examples are an embodiment of what Faulkner regards as “poetic inquiry” that can “uncovers buried and forgotten identities within us and exposes the inequities created when we refuse to place identity in communion with place.”³⁸

Insofar, the above points had shown that aesthetics and poetic forms emerging from politically fraught time and place are inherently political and can articulate this so. To assimilate the points by Bleiker, Faulkner and earlier literary sources related to Jendela on the interrelationship between aesthetics and politics into a framework that is being developed for this thesis, the author considers Jacques Rancière’s *Distribution of the Sensible*, a concept that explores the political dimension of aesthetics and an aesthetic dimension of the political. A dominant theme of

³⁶ Heidi Van Rooyen, “Race and Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Making Coloredness Visible through Poetic Inquiry” in *Poetic Inquiry as Social Justice and Political Response*, ed. Sandra L. Faulkner and Abigail Cloud (Delaware: Vernon Press 2019), 89.

Van Rooyen argues that “reclaiming coloredness” through poetry and narrative can help “project a positive self-image in the face of pervasive negative racial stereotyping and perhaps as a way to finally negate shame,” affirming poetic inquiry’s role in healing and reclamation.

³⁷ John J. Guiney Yallop, “Claiming Identity in the Presence of Oppressive Silenc(e)(ing)” in *Poetic Inquiry as Social Justice and Political Response*, ed. Sandra L. Faulkner and Abigail Cloud (Delaware: Vernon Press 2019), 101.

Guiney Yallop writes of needing to return to “the place of my birth, the place where my body had begun, a place where I have often gone to heal,” when he was diagnosed with prostate cancer. While there he discovered his grandmother was Aboriginal. He wrote poetry to make sense of this newfound identity, to release prior understandings of who he was and to embrace who he is becoming.

³⁸ Sandra L. Faulkner, *Poetic Inquiry into Place and Local Identities* in in *Poetic Inquiry as Social Justice and Political Response*, ed. Sandra L. Faulkner and Abigail Cloud (Delaware: Vernon Press 2019), 46.

Rancière's work is how political and social identities can arise and how the voice of excluded groups can come to be heard and recognised by the dominant social order, such as the process of new identities and subjectivities in the 20th century that was gaining political presence when LGBTQ and civil rights movement became prominent. For Rancière, this movement arises specifically through acts of perception and the birth of new identities not through traditional party politics or government legislation but in discreet transformative episodes of perception, experience and importantly, through art. Rancière reveals aesthetics and politics have a consubstantial relationship in the *Distribution of the Sensible* which he described as,

A system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions with it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts. This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time. It is on the basis of this primary aesthetics that it is possible to raise the question of 'aesthetic practices' as I understand them, that is forms of visibility that disclose artistic practices, the place they occupy, what they 'do' or 'make' from the standpoint of what is common to the community. Artistic practices intervene in the general distribution of way of doing and making and the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility.³⁹

³⁹ Jacques Rancière, "The Distribution of the Sensible: Politics and Aesthetics" in (New York: Continuum International Publish Group 2004), 13.

To interpret Rancière's ideas, the author considers Gabriel Rockhill's summation of the *Distribution of the Sensible* which considers aesthetics as political because it is a mode of perception that is determined by a social order.

The distribution of the sensible is an allocation of people to particular places in society and an organised distribution that means everyone has their place and a part to play whereby there is no subject that would exceed the distribution of roles. Happening against this is politics, and here politics is described as a transcendental concept. Politics happen because of the interruption of the established order by a subject that attempts to verify the presupposition of a quality that there is no pre-given hierarchy because in principle we are equal. So, politics is the intervention of the established order and its attempted reconfiguration from the point of view of the subject that exceeds that given distribution. That then produces a political subject that performs this act but then is never substantiated.⁴⁰

To surmise what is political about artists, aesthetics and artistic production, Toni Ross' essay *Image, montage* advances the idea that "a single artist's inventiveness is not on its own sufficient to open the doors of artistic visibility" but rather "artistic cases are rendered salient and intelligible within specific 'regimes of art', or different systems of making, conceptualizing and assessing artistic activity."⁴¹

In summary, *Distribution of the Sensible* reveals that no art can escape its condition in relation to the dominant ordering of perception within society. Simply said, all art holds some kind of political dimension. Furthermore, politics can never escape an aesthetic and perceptual understanding because it is always engaged with

⁴⁰ Gabriel Rockhill, "Rancière: Legacy, Contributions and Limitations," Critical Theory Workshop, accessed 1 June 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gww08h49nX4>, 6:12 mins.

⁴¹ Toni Ross, "Image, Montage" in *Jacques Rancière Key Concepts*, ed. Jean-Philippe Deranty (London: Routledge 2010), 153.

seeing, hearing and recognising different subjects, identities and tensions. The author's understanding is that aesthetics and politics are bound to each other through a social order.

Though a large part of Rancière's terminology is premised on western art and philosophical contexts that may not be directly applicable for the cultural specificities of Jendela and Indonesian art. It is nonetheless an established idea that can still be explored as it provides the tools to think about aesthetics as a political entity. These discussions will be a starting point to define the political and the poetic and a construction of an interpretive framework that shall integrate both contexts closer to Jendela and Indonesian art in chapter two.

Methodology

Analysis

To carry out these analyses of Jendela, I conducted close readings of primary sources, analysed specific works of art and conducted interviews with the artists specifically for this investigation. I studied Jendela's critical reception in secondary sources such as published interviews, biographies, catalogue essays and exhibition reviews. In examining the critical perspectives arising from these sources, in tandem, I developed my analysis through testimonials by the artists as well as curators and scholars from Indonesia and the region who are well versed with the group's practice and contemporary Indonesian art. To illustrate my argument, I made a selection of artworks from the years framing this study, and selected pieces that best demonstrate my argument that political resonances can be found in the group's aesthetics.

Selection of Artworks

In fulfilling the objectives of this thesis to present an alternative view on Jendela through a re-reading of early pieces, its selection was guided by the aims of this research to highlight political resonances within works of art that had not been studied or appreciated extensively in existing literature. To have a wide as possible view of the works Jendela had produced from 1997 – 2003, I started collecting reproductions of the works from the catalogues of the artists' exhibitions, the online archives of the Indonesian Visual Art Archives (IVAA), auction houses Christie's and Sotheby's. Furthermore, upon my request both Gajah gallery and private collectors in Singapore and Indonesia agreed to share digital reproductions of works from their archives.

Due to a large number of works, I adopted a curated process to identify and narrow down the most suitable pieces to demonstrate my points. I developed different categories to identify and shortlist the works based on specific visual and symbolic elements that appeared most frequently. These categories I had devised were based on three key metaphors which are *Coretan (Transient Lines)* to show how Jendela emulates and expresses lines to comment on tensions of the time; *Bayangan Bentuk (Allusion of Form)* to discuss how Jendela draws upon material and form loaded with everyday social experience; and *Jiwa Ketok (Visible Soul)* to explore the representations of the body as a metaphor to mirror the era's anxieties, uncertainties and realities. Though not all the pieces could fit neatly into the three thematic categories, nonetheless it helped to make a very focused shortlist of works to support in my arguments.

During the interviews with the artists, I took the opportunity to find out more about the pieces for a significant number of these works had little to no published description. Discussions were guided with a portfolio of artwork reproductions I

had shown to each artist to seek their views on the motivation, conceptual and technical details behind these works. Upon completing and reviewing the interviews, I made a final shortlist of nine works for this thesis that best demonstrate the argument I am trying to make.

Despite my attempts to locate where the actual pieces are so I could view them in person and up-close, it was not possible. The pieces have been sold to private collectors and changed hands over the years. So, it is hard to locate who the current owners of the works are. Nonetheless, in every artwork caption here, I had identified the source of the artwork reproduction for the reader's reference.

Interviews

Since this thesis specifically explores the artists' individuality and poetic tendencies, it was hard to grasp their convictions and motivations from the rather generalised existing literature on the group. Commentary by the artists was scarce. Hence, in my search for answers, I contacted the artists to enquire if they might be open to giving their insights to my research proposition. They replied positively as they felt this thesis's argument was a different and fresh take on the group, that could possibly re-address early misconceptions about their practice. Members of Jendela are elusive and rarely give interviews, so I was fortunate they accepted my proposal to meet them face-to-face in their studios in Yogyakarta.

I conducted structured interviews with each of the artists asking the same set of questions addressing the cultural, conceptual and contextual factors underlying their practice. Additionally, as a cultural practitioner familiar with the Indonesian language, I conducted interviews in Indonesian and translated them into English for the purpose of this thesis. The interview questions can be referred to in Appendix B.

Considering this study aims to capture the motivations and complexities of Jendela's poetic sensibilities in the social contexts of the group's early years marked by a period of political strife, a qualitative approach with the interviews would be a suitable choice. Rather than developing results and arriving at a phenomenon through a quantitative approach that would involve mainly data and statistical analysis, a qualitative approach is much more suitable for this type of research that would require the collection and analysis of non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions and experiences through the artists' perspectives and testimonials.

Though the qualitative approach allows a degree of openness where I am able to make on the spot decisions during the interview on a reflective level, the main line

of enquiry was still guided by an interview guide I had developed. The process was planned and carried out in these five stages:

1. Purpose: To develop an interview guide, I first defined the purpose of this research investigation and the conception of the three main themes for the artworks I wish to address as case studies in this research. To decide on the questions and selection of artworks for discussion, I first established the investigation's premise and goals as outlined in the interview guide on page 154.

2. Interview guide: To conduct the interviews, a guide was developed to plan the course of the interviews, identify topics and produce a sequence of questions based on insights and points extrapolated from existing literature and my hypothesis that the 'political is in the poetic' of Jendela's early practice. To ensure that my interview process would be conducted ethically, I completed a course for interviews and surveys conducted by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). Furthermore, my interview guide and questions were submitted to and vetted by NTU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that there were no leading questions. The interview guide can be found in the Appendix B.

3. Interviews: To conduct the interviews, I followed the approved interview guide but yet allowed for a reflective approach during the interviews to respond or advance spontaneous remarks by the interviewees that might not strictly follow the sequence of questions. The interview was first introduced to the interviewees who are the artists of Jendela through telecommunication to introduce myself as the researcher, the purpose of the interview, how it will be carried out and recorded whereby excerpts of the interviews will be published for this thesis. This preliminary session was to seek the artists' views, consent, and to address any questions they had before conducting the face-to-face interviews in their studios in Yogyakarta. To help the artists prepare for the interviews, the interview guide and questions were e-mailed in advance before the actual in-person interviews. To assist in the discussion of artworks selected for this study, I had prepared a reference portfolio of

reproductions in digital and print formats of artworks produced by each of the artists dating from 1997 – 2003, as well as a pre-selection of artworks I had identified as case studies for this thesis under the themes of *Coretan (Transient Lines)*, *Bayangan Bentuk (Allusion of Form)* and *Jiwa Ketok (Visible Soul)*. Though I am familiar with the Indonesian language and led the interviews, a professional translator was engaged to assist in this process for the artists communicated in local vernaculars that I am not entirely familiar with. These interviews were recorded as audio files, whereby commentaries were selected, transcribed and translated into English for this thesis.

4. Selection: Newly gathered information from the oral interviews were explicated based on the occurrence of specific comments by the artists in relation to the main topics of this thesis' chapters. The topics were developed through the main ideas I had conceived for the thesis which are the political, and the poetic, as well as the three aforementioned themes for artwork case studies.

5. Reporting: To communicate the key findings of the interviews, a selection of relevant excerpts and quotations were presented in the appropriate chapters of the thesis. As interviews are rare with this group, I allowed the artists to explain what they meant and retained the terms they used. Where appropriate, or useful, I applied wider contextual knowledge of the region to convert the conversation into a graduate level discussion.

Thesis Structure

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introduction is divided into three main sections. First, it gives an overview of Jendela and the background of the research topic. Second, it conveys the significance of this research by articulating its main argument, and positioning of Jendela's oeuvre in Indonesia's contemporary art. Third, it gives a roadmap on how the objectives set out in this thesis were achieved.

Chapter 2: The Political in the Poetic

This chapter discusses the overarching framework of the thesis that intertwines two contextual categories: the political and the poetic. The political refers to the time and place conditioning Jendela's formative years, that is Yogyakarta during Reformasi; the poetic refers to the group's sensibilities inspired by the proverbial communication style of their Minangkabau culture. Taken together, it defines a framework which renders visible the strategic connections, flow of ideas and mutual influence among their works. These are discussed in the subsequent chapters which develop three key themes.

Chapter 3: Coretan (Transient Lines)

Bearing in mind the significance of the oratorical in the cultural conditions of Jendela's early years, this chapter explores how the group's aesthetics emerged from rhetorical elements that are textual in form and dialectical in concept. It studies the artists' early explorations in developing a visual language for artistic and emotional expression through the signifying elements of language and the instinctive act of mark-making and writing. This chapter illustrates how Jendela's artworks of this

nature were more than compositional explorations of lines and colours, but are instead loaded with the artists' responses - in the forms of their reflections and experiences - to the volatile political climate of Reformasi. It also reveals the political potential of illegible writing and the obscuring of signification as forms of resistance.

Chapter 4: Bayangan Bentuk (Allusion of Form)

This chapter argues for the significance of Jendela's poetic gestures, explicating the political through the quotidian, underscored by the notion of *alam* ('world' or 'nature') and driven by aesthetic explorations in the realms of intuition and imagination. It examines how allusions of the everyday abound in Jendela's early works, which provoke reflections on the communicable and imperceptible forces governing life at large.

Chapter 5: Jiwa Ketok (Visible Soul)

This chapter examines Jendela's portrayals of the body as a metaphor of the human condition, and how these portrayals were the products of the artists' suppressed emotions refracted through the larger societal crisis unfolding around them. I propose reading a selection of works through the philosophical lens of *Jiwa Ketok: Visible Soul* by S.Sudjojono that emphasises the visible expression of the spirit or essence of the soul in art by challenging ingrained conventions of representation.⁴² In that respect, Jendela portrayals of the body are more than mere representations of actual persons or characters; instead, they are symbolic of an emotion or state of mind. This common physiological experience reveals Jendela's empathy with the bodies of others transcending social or political allegiances.

⁴² S.Sudjojono is widely regarded as "the father of modern Indonesian art", whose ideas reverberate in contemporary art in Indonesia. Sudjojono's idea of *Jiwa Ketok* (*Visible Soul*) will be further elucidated in chapter five.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter concludes the study by summarising why the ‘poetic’ had such a central role in Jendela’s conceptual concerns. By demonstrating how Jendela had agency to explore a range of political perspectives and opinions through the ‘poetic’, it relooks at past assumptions about the group’s apolitical stance, suggesting the presence of latent political elements in the group’s early works. Since Jendela was shunned by Yogyakarta’s left-leaning art world, yet readily embraced by the art market in Indonesia, this chapter asks what bearing such findings might reposition Jendela’s significance within Indonesian contemporary art.

CHAPTER 2

The Political in the Poetic

This chapter shall develop an interpretive framework based on the themes of the political and poetic framed within the key points raised in the literature review exploring how political presence is produced through transformative episodes of perception, experience embodied in art. This shall be further enriched by this chapter's discussion of the contexts conditioning the time, place and cultural habitus of Jendela's early works.

To define the 'political', the author acknowledges the word as a "ubiquitous and seemingly indispensable term used in the discussion of human affairs," as well as, "conditions through which politics is maintained, such as the rules and conventions which ensure order and the manner of their application" described by Miller and Valentine respectively.⁴³ Such definitions could be located in Rockhill's interpretation of the *Distribution of the Sensible* whereby,

Politics happen because of the interruption of the established order by a subject that attempts to verify the presupposition of a quality that there is no pre-given hierarchy because in principle we are equal. So, politics is the intervention of the established order and its attempted reconfiguration from the point of view from the subject that exceeds that given distribution. That then produces a political subject that performs this act but then is never substantiated.⁴⁴

⁴³ Eugene F. Miller, "What Does 'Political' Mean," *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 1, (1980): 56 and Jeremy Valentine, "The Political," *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 23, No. 2-3 (1999): 507.

⁴⁴ Gabriel Rockhill, "Rancière: Legacy, Contributions and Limitations," Critical Theory Workshop, accessed 1 June 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gww08h49nX4>, 6:12 mins.

Therefore, to extrapolate the political dimensions of Jendela and the group's early works, the author shall reference an emerging idea from the literature review that the political is an interruption of the social order which in essence can be unpacked from Jendela's position in the art world of Yogyakarta through the socio-political contexts conditioning the group's early years. The author shall assess the conditions of Jendela's early artistic production, and the social-political relations within which the group's artistic production was carried out. For it would not only entail a study of the works themselves but also the complexities of their production and reception, and it is here where the political could be located. Hence, the author proposes that the definition of the political are inferred through two aspects, namely time and place. Firstly, the period of this study that was marked by the political era of Reformasi. Secondly, the city Yogyakarta, a major cultural capital in Indonesia "has a long history of social and political art."⁴⁵

To define the poetic, it is referred to as aesthetics – what is made audible and visible, and the author's understanding as "forms of visibility that disclose artistic practices."⁴⁶ To elucidate the aesthetic context of these works, the author shall assess the conditions of Jendela's poetic sensibilities which are significantly informed by the group's cultural habitus. There are two main aspects of the 'poetic', first it is in the domain of the rhetoric and second, its engagement with the realms of intuition, emotion and imagination. Hence, the author proposes that the definition of the poetic is derived from the aesthetic and philosophical conditioning of the group's cultural habitus identity that is renowned for its literary and oratorical culture, that is the Minangkabau of Sumatra.

Hence, I propose an interpretive framework of this thesis as, 'The Political in the Poetic' that is best understood as contextual categories that interlace two

⁴⁵ Ahmad Mashadi and Enin Supriyanto, *Jendela: A Play of the Ordinary* (Singapore: NUS Museum, 2009), 1.

⁴⁶ Jacques Rancière, "The Distribution of the Sensible: Politics and Aesthetics" in (New York: Continuum International Publish Group 2004), 13.

thematic interpretive destinations. The political is in the poetic. The poetic is generative, giving rise to the political. It is vital to keep in mind that the two are entwined. The definitions of the political will be discussed in reference to the social, cultural, communitarian and historical connotations, such as discourses on the contemporary art world in Indonesia and the 'poetic' which will study Jendela aesthetics focused on the influence of Minangkabau proverbial culture. An example of this framework application to locate the political in the poetic would be in Jendela choice to define their practice as aesthetically and artistically poetical instead of producing polemically-focused artworks as their peers in Yogyakarta. This disruption of the established aesthetic order in Yogyakarta could be regarded as an act loaded with political significance. Furthermore, Jendela's poetic sensibilities was a way for the group to impel deeper reflection and critical insight into their experiences, perspectives and observations during a time of political change which shall be highlighted later through the artists' statements in this chapter.

The 'political in the poetic' is an interpretive device aims to counter prevailing opinions that Jendela early art is not critical because it is not sufficiently political, and that the group's practice and aesthetics are exclusively or predominantly 'formalistic'. In combining the political with the poetic, it is a strategy for claiming Jendela political dimension while not disclaiming the group's poetic sensibilities. This study suggests Jendela's visual and aesthetic languages that create poetically-inspired art provide a way for them to impel deeper reflection and focus critical insight via their own experiences. Even Jendela's non-conformist attitude towards artistic trends is possibly imbued with political significance. In choosing to exalt their individuality and origins, they were engaging in an act of identity politics as artists and persons, to assert their artistic choices and defending them against prevailing opinions of what art should be in the art centre of Yogyakarta. Therefore, Jendela explored a different way to approach the historical, cultural and social value of their everyday experiences as a way to reassert the personal into the political sphere.

These particular ideas can be observed in the metaphorical representations of Jumaldi's personal struggles, Handiwirman's homeless Suyar, Yunizar's disenfranchised persons and Rudi's defaced flag. Through all these, we can see how the subjectivities of individuals not part of the majority find expression in a sensory complexity of experiences and commentaries, which provide unique perspectives on the societal tensions of Reformasi's political transitions.

To express the importance of aesthetics in times of political conflict and change, it is useful to refer to political theoretician Roland Bleiker's *Aesthetics and World Politics* which argued for aesthetics as an interpretive mechanism with the potential to engender new ways of looking and thinking about the political,

Aesthetic sources can offer us alternative insights into international relations; a type of reflective understanding that emerges not from systematically applying technical skills of analysis which prevail in social sciences, but from cultivating a more open-ended level of sensibility about the political. We might then be able to appreciate what we otherwise cannot even see: perspectives and people excluded from prevailing purviews, for instance, or the emotional nature and consequences of political events.⁵⁰

By emphasising the everyday over the nationalistic or the heroic, Jendela is tabling a political agenda of emphasising focus upon people who are usually erased and obscured from dominant narratives. Additionally, Jendela displays a desire to move away from established orders and create new structures. To illustrate this point, we shall turn to the interviews with the artists and examine their specific works of art, starting with a discussion on *Tarik Mimpi (Pulled Dream)* by Rudi Mantofani.

⁵⁰ Roland Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan 2009), 2.

Rudi Mantofani *Tarik Mimpi (Pulled Dream)*

Figure 2. Rudi Mantofani, “Tarik Mimpi (Pulled Dream),” 2002, Acrylic on canvas, 200 x 120 cm. In *Rudi Mantofani Cakrawala Ganda*, page 5, Jakarta: Nadi Gallery, 2002. Image courtesy of IVAA.

Rudi Mantofani’s work *Tarik Mimpi (Pulled Dream)* (Figure 2) which alluded to failed dreams was a reflection on the illusory nature of political ideals, as seen in a commonplace yet politically loaded symbol; the Indonesia national flag. In Rudi’s rumination below, it becomes apparent the poetic sensibilities to reflect on the political were informed by the subconscious,

A dream could be a goal or it could be borne out of our psychological state, a figment of imagination. To dream is to be unconscious for when we dream in our sleep. A dream could be a reflection of our psychological anxieties. Sometimes when we are afraid, the dreams just appear.⁵¹

⁵¹ Rudi Mantofani, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 1 December 2019, MPEG-4, 02:03:06-02:04:00.

“Saya memberi keluar masuk tadi, ilusi dan realitas. Kalau mimpi, mimpi itu juga ada kategori sih. Mimpi itu bisa jadi impian, atau mimpi itu terlahir karena gejala psikologis kita. Bisa juga mimpi itu imajinasi saja. Mimpi itu tidak sadar, misalnya mimpi dalam tidur. Tapi sebetulnya mimpi itu ada refleksi persoalan psikologis kita, sebetulnya. Kadang-kadang kalau kita takut apa, tiba-tiba jadi mimpi apa. Saya mencoba menggambarkan hal-hal yang abstrak tadi, saya jadikan lebih abstrak lagi.”

Rudi further heightened polarising tensions, by placing the prefix *Tarik* (Pull) before *Mimpi* (Dream). He explained his reasoning as,

Force is implied when something is pulled. So, I forced a dream when in fact there was no dream, just to illustrate the point that dreams are not reality and it is an invention of the mind. I did feel psychological pressure and tried to imagine it. It was more than an imagination but rather a sense of depression. Therefore, what I termed as *Tarik Mimpi (Pulled Dream)* was fitting for the art piece in relation to the time it was made.⁵²

The paradoxical title hints at what one should expect visually. Rudi's invocation of the subconscious can be sensed in the dream-like tenor of the painting; this is evident in its bleached appearance, leaving to loom ghostlike like a haunting memory, rendering uncanny what was once vibrant. The central emblem of this painting, which had been described as an abstract rendition in the likeness of the Indonesian national flag, represents the political.⁵³ The overall painting composition reveals recognisable elements of the flag, such as its unmistakable symmetrical design, and its colours of red and white. The red symbolises blood, or physical life; and the white represents purity, or the spiritual life. Seen together, these form a symbol of a complete human being.⁵⁴ However, in *Tarik Mimpi (Pulled Dream)*, its

⁵² Rudi Mantofani, phone interview with author, 20 October 2019, MPEG-4, 00:23:42-00:25:00.

“Itu kan dipaksa kalo ditarik. Jadi saya memaksa mimpi aja, padahal sebenarnya itu kan bukan mimpi. Itu bahasa kias aja, ‘tarik mimpi’. Mimpi yang saya paksa — gitu lho, kalo bahasa Indonesiannya. ‘Tarik’ itu kan kata kerja, nah ‘tarik’, artinya saya mencoba ... apa ya... menggambarkan bahwa mimpi ini ngga ada sebetulnya. Lalu di-ada-adakan. Itu khayalan lah, istilahnya. Dramatisnya itu tentu ada tekanan kejiwaan saya, coba mengimajinasikannya. Cuma itu lebih daripada imajinasinya, Lebih tertekan. Jadi bahasa saya itu ‘Tarik mimpi’, jadinya lebih tepat waktu itu. Kalo soal itu sih saya bisa olah sih ngomongnya, agak sedikit ruwet.”

⁵³ Hendro Winyanto, “Esei Pengantar (Introduction Essay)” in *Cakrawala Ganda (Double Horizon)*, ed. Nadi Gallery (Jakarta: Nadi Gallery, 2003), 3.

⁵⁴ “Courage and purity, the identity of Sang Saka Merah Putih,” The ASEAN Post, accessed 12 August 2020, <https://theaseanpost.com/article/courage-and-purity-identity-sang-saka-merah-putih>.

drained colours speak of its devaluation and a displaced belief in such ideals. Rudi further subverts the image of the flag by staining the bottom half in dribs and washes of paint, and inscribed it with illegible scribbles and marks, characteristic of *coretan* (which shall be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.) A closer look at this part of the painting shows the semblance of a street wall marked with graffiti marks. To further dissolve the political as an ideal, Rudi's blends both loaded imagery of the flag and the street wall, as an attempt to collapse the boundaries between the extraordinary and the everyday. Finally, the textual defacements on the flag and wall accentuate a show of rejection for ideals imbricated by the political. Viewed as enactments of graffiti, these markings defy authority but also imply political agency through individual expression for "wall drawing, or graffiti, is one of the most accessible strategies for recording dissent, indignation, and rage in public space."⁵⁵

Aesthetic Languages, Poetic Sensibilities

It could be suggested Jendela was not interested in making political art, but instead in creating art politically. Accordingly, in relation to the aesthetic choices of the group, the political, can be felt in Rudi's remarks below,

Developing visuals, be it the material, the shape of the object, the technique, were indeed part of the elements that we are trying to process at that time. So that's the point of it... there was a disagreement over the trend at the time in Indonesia, or in Jogja. So poetic choices are not choices anyway, because we don't enjoy people's choices, and we're already happy with the poetic way, or metaphors, symbols.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ "Tercerunquinto on Graffiti," Art Forum Magazine, Summer 2017, accessed 18 August 2020 <https://www.artforum.com/print/201706/tercerunquinto-on-graffiti-68679>.

⁵⁶ Rudi Mantofani, phone interview with author, 20 October 2019, MPEG-4, 00:15:08-00:16:55. "Betul, memilih. Makanya saya tanya maksudnya — Yang seperti tadi, sebenarnya mbak Nor juga sudah menyimpulkan, kecenderungan teman-teman di Indonesia, khususnya di Jogja itu, mencoba mengkritisi kondisi

Through Rudi's account, it became increasingly clear how Jendela's stance on formal properties of art and the construction of a visual language employing poetic strategies were at odds with the prevailing artistic trends in Yogyakarta. Marx Wartofsky in "The Politics of Art" discussed such relations by which "power, governance and class interest" is not only about "some abstract societal sense" but also concerns ideas of "domination and subordination in matters aesthetic: in style, influence, creative direction, and aesthetic ideology."⁵⁷ Therein lies the political significance of Jendela's aesthetics and art because it challenges the long-established notions and systems of art in Yogyakarta which has a long storied history of activism art. What these are in relation to Jendela's art shall be elucidated further in the subsequent section discussing political contexts.

To further illustrate how the political is embedded in the poetic, we turn again to Rudi's comments about the political conditions of the time and how they coloured Jendela's early aesthetic development,

Consciously, it really started from that. Looking for other ways to try to critique the condition. So through the poetic, we tried to look for visual choices that further enrich the wealth of the discourse. We looked for an alternative aesthetic language to express many things at that time. It was our tendency to disagree with the language that was used, because as art language, it sounds more like a journalist's report, yeah? So, such visual choices was not

keadaan politik. Mencoba berbahasa sama dengan reportase wartawan, jadi kita merasa gimana bagusya ya? Gimana menariknya ya? Jadi kita tentu mencari cara jalan lain atau pilihan perspektif kita, kita mencoba memperkaya perspektif untuk membahaskan keadaan. Seni itu yang dituntut harusnya kan di situ — mengembangkan visual, baik materialnya, bentuk objeknya, tekniknya, atau apanya — itu memang menjadi bagian dari unsur-unsur yang coba kita olah waktu itu. Jadi memang intinya itu... ada ketidaksepakatan kecenderungan waktu itu di Indonesia, atau di Jogja. Jadi pilihan puitis itu bukan pilihan sih, karena kita tidak menyenangi dengan pilihan orang, dan kita sudah senang dengan cara puitis itu, atau metafor, simbol, atau kias — ada bahasa-bahasa apa itu."

⁵⁷ Marx W. Wartofsky "The Politics of Art: The Domination of Style and Crisis in Contemporary Art", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Spring, 1993): 217 -25.

interesting for us at that time. People were more verbal in seeing things. It is true from what Nor said that the tendency of Jogja artists at that time was to make reportage works. They tried to document and report the condition.⁵⁸

Rudi's remarks strongly suggest the group was not as detached from the political realities of the time as critics claim. Rudi reiterated "we were certainly looking for other ways to follow our own perspective in articulating the politically charged condition of the time," then described his Yogyakarta contemporaries, whose work emphasised political commentary as well as social documentation in a "reporters' language". He asserted how this language was not the right fit for their group and thus they strove to create an aesthetic language of their own. With regards to their efforts to construct an alternative aesthetic language, Rudi said,

Yes, it happened naturally, as it came from the Minangkabau custom, with its literary language, its culture – in Sumatra we call it *pepatah-petitih* or proverbial sayings, such as metaphors, symbols. So, it's naturally innate. It's more accurate if we speak in this manner - because it assumes that when people speak through symbols, it means that they have comprehended better than others, and speak more clearly. This is my personal view, it does not mean that it is correct, if people speak in metaphors, it means they have tried to find the best option in communicating. That's why we agreed to process this innate nature from Sumatra, and the tendency to narrow our thinking about

⁵⁸ Rudi Mantofani, phone interview with author, 20 October 2019, MPEG-4, 00:10:29-00:12:26.

"Secara kesadaran, sebetulnya memang dimulai dari itu. Mencari cara lain untuk mencoba mengkritisi kondisi. Jadi puitis itu, kita mencoba mencari pilihan visual yang lebih memperkaya khazanah wacana. Kita mencari alternatif-alternatif bahasa untuk mengungkapkan banyak hal waktu itu. Dan juga sedikit tidak sepaham dengan tadi kata-kata mbak Nor bahwa ada kecenderungan teman-teman Jogja untuk ke kiri. Itu kecenderungan kita merasa tidak sepakat dengan bahasa itu, karena untuk bahasa seni kok istilahnya seperti laporan wartawan gitu ya? Reportasi biasa gitu. Jadi apa yang menjadi menarik dalam pilihan-pilihan visual untuk berbicara menjadi tidak menarik untuk kita waktu itu. Orang-orang lebih verbal dalam melihat sesuatu. Bener dari yang mbak Nor kasih tahu bahwa kecenderungan seniman Jogja waktu itu berkarya reportasi aja. Mereka mencoba merekam kejadian dan melaporkan."

the things we were expressing at the time to politics was too verbal, reassuring us that our language was more appropriate – the said poetic language.⁵⁹

Jendela's coded communication employing metaphors, symbols and innuendoes as aesthetic strategies, we might surmise, is political. It is an art that deliberately conceals, yet capable of compelling viewers into unravelling the forces and ideas behind the works. In its unravelling, Jendela's poetical works underscore the connections of the artists' experiences and perspectives with larger socio-political themes of power, ecology, identity and displacement.

⁵⁹ Rudi Mantofani, phone interview with author, 20 October 2019, MPEG-4, 00:17:16-00:18:48.

“Ya, dia berjalan aja, natural aja, karena itu dari kebiasaan daerah Minangkabau, dengan bahasa sastra nya, budaya nya, kalau bahasanya di Sumatra itu pepatah petiti, seperti bahasa kias, simbol. Jadi itu tentu bawaan natural aja sebetulnya. Lebih mengena jika kita berbahasa dengan cara pilihan — karena menanggapi bahwa ketika orang berbicara dengan simbol, artinya dia sudah mencerna lebih baik daripada orang lain, dan berbicara lebih jelas. Ini pandangan saya bukan berarti benar ya, kalau orang sudah bicara dengan metafor, itu artinya dia sudah mencoba mencari opsi yang terbaik dalam berbahasa. Makanya kita sepakat mencerna bawaan dari Sumatra nya, dan kecenderungan mempersempit pemikiran terhadap hal-hal yang kita ungkapkan waktu itu terhadap politik terlalu verbal, jadi meyakinkan bahwa bahasa kita lebih tepat — bahasa puitis tadi.”

Identity Politics, Memories of Trauma

The oblique communication nature of Jendela's art exposes social conventions of a culture they were conditioned in, and to a varying degree, a sense of circumventing personal danger in tenuous socio-political situations. Jumaldi felt the detachment to make any direct socio-political commentary could arise from the fact he and the rest of Jendela hail from a generation indoctrinated by fear-mongering elders forbidding any form of political involvement. This caution is due to traumatic memories of innocent civilian victims of their homeland who were caught in the political crossfire and armed conflict between central government forces and Socialist rebels in what was known as the "The PRRI-Permesta rebellion of 1958."⁶⁰

Yes, because if we look, there is indeed a traumatised generation after the incident, and that is our fathers' generation. Well maybe our fathers explained (differently) and it was implanted in us without us knowing. So, it is embedded in our subconscious, and we automatically avoid talking about it.⁶¹

⁶⁰ The PRRI-Permesta rebellion was a rebel movement organised by regional army commanders from Sumatra and Sulawesi, and the Socialist party PSI from West Sumatra in reaction to a growing authoritarian, corrupt central government and influence of the Communist Party. It started in 1958 when PRRI-Permesta presented an ultimatum to the central government for changes in national policy and political constellations. The armed conflict between the central government forces and PRRI rebels in Sumatra continued until 1961 and estimated to have claimed 35,000 lives. Tadjoeuddin, Zulfan, *Explaining Collective Violence in Contemporary Indonesia: From Conflict to Cooperation*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 28.

In Kazuhisa Matsui's research paper *Decentralization in Nation State Building of Indonesia*, the PRRI/Permesta rebellions were described as "regional rebellions that spread in non-Java regions such as Sumatra and Sulawesi in 1956-1960. After the first nationwide general election in 1955, political party and military leaders in Sumatra in late 1956 set up a "council" to seize control of local administration. In Jakarta, where the central government was located, rivalry grew intense between the alliance of the Soekarno-led Indonesian Nationalist Party (Partai Nasional Indonesia: PNI) and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), which rapidly increased its presence, and the Islamic Masyumi Party. After Indonesia's Vice President Hatta who was of Minangkabau extraction resigned, the Masyumi Party and the Indonesian Socialist Party (Partai Sosialis Indonesia: PSI) rose in revolt against the central government, and the PRRI was set up in Bukittinggi of West Sumatra. The central government viewed the regional rebellions as a serious threat to national unity and used the armed forces to crush them."

⁶¹ Jumaldi Alfi, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, MPEG-4, 01:22:26-01:23:25.

"Iya nya karena bila kita tengok, generasi setelah itu memang ada traumatik. Dan itu adalah generasi bapak kita. Nah mungkin bapak kita menerangkan (secara berbeda-beda) dan itu ditanamkan ke kita tanpa kita sadar. Sebenarnya pada prinsipnya, pada dasarnya, orang Minang itu orang yang suka konflik. Suka berdebat. Kalau kamu lihat founding father Indonesia itu isinya orang Minang semua. Tapi selepas itu, tidak ada lagi orang Minang. Nah mungkin sikap itu yang

Unpacking Jendela's poetical art language through the lens of their ethnic identity, I suggest a political significance to the group's minority status in Yogyakarta, and how their aesthetic language based on the poetical culture of the Minangkabau tested the stronghold of their Javanese peers and the dominance of the polemical art favoured in Yogyakarta. The conclusive deduction is the political potential of certain social groups rests not on organising solely around belief systems and manifestos; instead, it is the formations around identity to "secure political freedom of specific constituency marginalised within its larger context", and this is politically loaded for "members of this constituency assert of reclaim ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant characterisations with the goal of greater self-determination."⁶²

Poetic Contexts and Influences of Jendela

This section turns to a contextual understanding of the poetic sensibilities in Jendela's visual and aesthetic language. For Jendela to define themselves as aesthetically and artistically poetical is also an act loaded with political significance; this was a way for them to impel deeper reflection and critical insight into their experiences, perspectives and observations during a time of political change. I start with a discussion of how their poetic sensibilities were influenced by the cultural conditions of their habitus, as members of the Minangkabau of West Sumatra, an ethnic group in Indonesia known for their literary and proverbial prowess. By unpacking Jendela through the poetical lens of Minangkabau poetics, we can illustrate an understanding of how the group's aesthetic and artistic language was

selalu ditanamkan, sehingga alam bawah sadar kita akhirnya tertanam, sehingga secara otomatis kita hindari. Jadi seperti politik itu, kita sebenarnya bukan kita itu *anti*-, tapi kita hindari untuk membicarakan itu. Bukan ketakutan atau apa, itu refleks aja."

⁶² Identity Politics, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed 10 September 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-politics/>.

developed from proverbs or proverbial forms through two pathways: content and design.

To establish a connection between the poetical language of Minang poetics and the visual art practice of Jendela, the paper makes reference to a discussion by Sarah Cleaveland in her dissertation *Painting the Poetic Image* on the parallels between the literary expression of poetry and visual expression of paintings; where both share a common goal of “revitalising human perception.”⁶³ This is achieved by tensions created between the structural elements powering poems or paintings, where such tensions are the essence of these artistic forms. The tensions created through the interactions of structural elements for poems are; phonology (sound), syntax (grammar), prosody (metrics and accent), and for paintings; visual form, line and colour. If tensions of structural elements are key to understanding the essence of poetical language, such aspects shall be examined in Minang proverbs known as *pepatah-petitih* recurring in Jendela’s thoughts on perception and interpretation as part of their artistic process discussed by the artists and scholars alike.

Pepatah-petitih is described in Lim Kim Hui’s philosophical study of proverbial forms of the Malay World as “a conclusion which is compactly and pithily stated, sometimes in the form of a *pantun* (quatrain), sometimes consisting only of two sentences and some even being drawn in only a very short sentence.”⁶⁴ If the essence of poems lies in the tensions of its structural elements, for *pepatah-petitih* Lim homed in on what “appears to be the traditional propositional statement consisting of at least one descriptive element, a descriptive element consisting of a topic and a comment.” Ultimately the propositional statement in such proverbs “contains all types of wisdom and philosophy that have been accumulated from real experiences.

⁶³ Sarah Mead Wyman Cleaveland, “Painting the Poetic Image: Laoköon Reconsidered,” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000), 9.

⁶⁴ Lim Kim Hui, “Budi as the Malay Mind: A Philosophical Study of Malay Ways of Reasoning and Emotion in Peribahasa,” (PhD diss., University of Hamburg, 2003), 11.

These are needed by society to survive, avoid problems and enhance standard of living.” Hence, to develop our proposition, it is possible *pepatah-petitih* engendered the group’s perspectives in interpreting their world and defining their conceptual ideas, and to do so, we would focus on these proverbs’ wisdom and philosophical content. Through the interviews with the artists, two key concepts can be extrapolated from *pepatah* that are pervasive in Jendela’s works, the first is *Alam* which refers to ‘knowledge’, ‘the world’, and the second is *Rasa*, which refers to ‘emotional tenor or flavour’. Both will be discussed later with specific *pepatah* examples.

Other than communicating ideals, *pepatah*’s indirect way of communicating is relevant to underscore the group’s coded artistic expression. For “indirectness is achieved through the use of proverb which enables the speaker to conceal his intended meaning; the motive behind this use of a proverb is that it is a form of speech in which criticism can be made, or advice given, without the offence being taken.”⁶⁵ It is manifested in the design of *pepatah-petitih* that tend to juxtapose two polarising elements to create meaning. This oxymoronic nature of such proverbial form is reflected in Jendela’s way of expressing themselves through code by mixing elements of duality such as illusion and reality which comes through in their art as irony, metaphor and abstraction.

Minang Poetic and Proverbial Traditions

In constructing their own aesthetic language of art, Jendela sought inspiration from the oratorical culture of their Minangkabau origins, as there was no long-standing school of thought in visual arts where they originated. According to Jumaldi Alfi,

⁶⁵ Ibid.

So, if it ends up tying us up that we're all Minangs, whether consciously or not, Minang culture ultimately affects our attitude with fine art. In Minang, we actually don't have a visual culture or fine art. We have a strong oratorical culture, so it's kind of poetry.⁶⁶

Jendela's poetic sensibility in indirect communication through the play of words and visual metaphors had been deduced by curators of their early exhibitions (such as Rizki Zaelani, Enin Supriyanto and Ahmad Mashadi) to be a culturally nuanced decision rooted in Minangkabau literary tradition.⁶⁷ Jendela members also mention that poetic expression comes naturally and subconsciously to them, as communicating in a proverbial style is a way of life for the Minangkabau. Such ideas are best encapsulated by Handiwirman who said,

Long ago, before Islamic teachings, there is “basandi syarak, basandi syarak alur dan patut”(Traditions follow sacred laws, sacred laws follow ebb and flow of nature). What is the flow and what is proper ... it's like ethics, yeah. It became a tradition. So, for example like this, this is my environment, there is something else that just came in here, he was not rejected, and also not accepted at first. But he may live here first, and he blends in first. If he is right, he can enter this culture, he can become one and will be taken as part of this culture. Now that's a character in Minangkabau culture. The way it works, in

⁶⁶ Jumaldi Alf, phone interview with the author, 13 October 2019, MPEG-4, 15:09-17:23.

“Ya, betul – pada awal-awalnya, sebenarnya karya-karya seni rupa nya Jendela itu ya puisi rupa, jadi semacam kenapa ada teks, simbol-simbol metafor. Jadi kami tidak bisa menyusun dalam bentuk kata-kata yang *rigid*, kami susun dalam bentuk *visual*. Kami merasa bahwa bentuk ini lebih efektif daripada kami menyusun kata-kata seperti *poem*. Jadi, kalau toh akhirnya yang mengikat kami itu bahwa kami semua orang Minang, jadi baik disadari ataupun tidak, ada kultur ke-Minang-an yang akhirnya mempengaruhi sikap kami melihat seni rupa. Di Minang, sebenarnya kami tidak punya budaya *visual* atau *fine art*. Kami punya budaya *oral* yang kuat, jadi semacam puisi. Kalau Nor lihat dalam sejarah literasi Indonesia, dari tahun-tahun awal literasi, orang Minang lah yang paling banyak membuat tulisan atau syair, Melayu lah itu – dan mereka memang kuat dalam teks dan Bahasa. Sebenarnya kami mempunyai keinginan yang sama – saya, Handi, Yunizar, atau – dan tumbuh dalam lingkungan itu, tetapi mungkin tidak punya kemampuan yang sama dalam menyusun teks sama seperti rekan-rekan kita yang memilih dunia penyair, gitu kan? Tapi secara spirit, sebenarnya sama. Nah kebetulan kami menyukai seni rupa, lalu akhirnya kami membikin puisi dalam bentuk rupa.”

⁶⁷ Based on exhibition catalogues *Biasa (Ordinary)* in 2005 by Rizki Zaelani, and *Jendela: A Play of the Ordinary* by Enin Supriyanto and Ahmad Mashadi in 2009.

my opinion. Now I am not a historian, but this is what I arranged such ideas in my artwork “No Roots No Shoots”. Why? Because the origin of the roots was unknown. No shoots, meaning they can’t think like “I’ll be like this forever,” no. Because they also accept changes from the outside. So, I think that Minangkabau culture can be more dynamic, yes, it can change all the time. As long as the people in the culture accept it, it will become part of that culture. But there is no power that can force something into that culture. It will be tested first, this can work or not.⁶⁸

The complex nature of Minang poetics described by Handiwirman that invariably informs Jendela’s poetic sensibilities, can be deciphered in the breakdown of the two archetypal *pepatahs* mentioned. The first, “*Adat bersandi syarak, syarak bersandi Kitabullah*” speaks of “Traditions follow sacred laws, sacred laws follow the book of revelations, the Al-Qur’an”. The second, “*Adat bersandi syarak, syarak bersandi alur dan patut*” means “Traditions follow sacred laws, sacred laws follow the ebb and flow.” Through both are archetypal *pepatahs* which reveal customary ideals governing life, they present two differing trajectories. The former proverb speaks of an adherence to Islamic principles, while the latter is entrenched in animistic laws. For an explanation of how such contradictions enrich Minangkabau perspectives on life and are consequently reflected in Jendela’s deft handling of duality in their artistic production, this paper turns to Taufik Abdullah’s treatise on conflict of *adat* and Islam in Minangkabau life,

⁶⁸ Handiwirman Saputra, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, MPEG-4, 01:53:54-01:55:55. “Kalau dulu sebelum ada ajaran Islam, ‘*adaik basandi syarak, syarak basandi alur dan patut*’. Alur dan patut itu apa ya... etika, ya? Dia menjadi tradisi. Jadi misalnya gini, ini lingkungan saya, ada hal lain baru masuk ke sini, dia ngga ditolak, dan juga ngga diterima dulu. Tapi dia bisa hidup dulu di sini, nah dia membaur dulu. Kalau dia bener, dia bisa masuk dalam kebudayaan ini, dia bisa jadi satu dan akan diambil menjadi bagian kebudayaan ini. Nah itu karakter yang ada di kebudayaan Minangkabau. Cara bekerjanya, menurut saya. Nah saya bukan ahli sejarah, tapi ini yang saya susun dalam ‘*Tak Berakar Tak Berpucuk*’ itu. Kenapa ‘*Tak Berakar Tak Berpucuk*’? Karena jelasnya akarnya itu, dia ngga, ngga – dia punya akar, tapi asalnya ngga tau dari mana. Ngga berpucuk nya itu, dia ngga bisa juga ‘aku akan seperti ini sampai kapanpun’, ngga. Karena dia menerima juga perubahan-perubahan dari luar. Nah jadi kebudayaan Minangkabau itu saya pikir memang bisa menjadi lebih dinamis ya, bisa berubah terus. Selama masyarakat dalam kebudayaan itu menerima, dia akan menjadi bagian dari kebudayaan itu. Tapi ngga ada kekuasaan yang bisa memaksa memasukkan sesuatu dalam kebudayaan itu. Dia akan diuji dulu, ini bisa jalan ngga.”

The Minangkabau...is famous for its strong attachment to its *adat* (body of local customs), which, it has commonly been assumed, stand opposite to Islamic law. It is this contradiction that causes Bosquet to find the Minangkabau case ‘a remarkable paradox in the sociology of Islam’ and Van Ronkel to ponder how the antithesis between *adat* and Islam, between local custom and the universal religion, can make a synthesis that becomes the foundation of the “Minangkabau character.”⁶⁹

Handiwirman’s account of contradictions influencing the dynamism and adaptability of the Minang culture, which he embraces in his practice, is echoed in Taufik’s reasoning that “the Minangkabau attitude toward *adat* is based on the juxtaposition of the imperative continuity of the system, and the recognition of the importance of change. Thus, it is implicit *adat* is always renewed and adjusted to the situation.” As a result, “the concept of conflict is not only recognised but is institutionalised within the social system itself.”⁷⁰ Through Handiwirman’s personal summation on the poetic nature of the Minangkabau, there is an emphasis of duality through the juxtaposition of two polarising elements: tradition and religion, matrilineal custom and patriarchal Islam, inner and outer worlds. This handling of duality is seen throughout Jendela’s allusive works of art, which construct a web of correlations triggering an imaginative reconstitution of the artistic form while retaining the visible, tangible function and materiality of the object. Just as allusions produce meaning for one form of text by referring to another through parody and contrast, works by Jendela are realised through a similar juxtaposition of materials and forms, inverting the conventional order of objects and word play of titles with the art pieces. In this manner, the design of proverbs are translated into image

⁶⁹ Taufik Abdullah, “Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau,” *Indonesia Cornell University Southeast Asia Programme*, Vol. 002 (October 1966): 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

making. The next section will develop this further, by discussing key concepts extrapolated from proverbs that inform Jendela's unique art-making perspectives through their interpretation of their world and conceptual ideas.

Alam

To expand an earlier proposition that Jendela's internalisation of Minang poetics have a bearing on their perspectives in how they interpret the world and develop conceptual ideas for their art, this section would like to highlight the term *alam* which had emerged from the interviews with Jendela as highlighted in the subsequent paragraphs. *Alam* is regarded as an overarching idea that underscores the group's internalisation of proverbial knowledge of Minang poetics in their engagement with the realms of intuition, emotion and imagination that is manifested into Jendela's aesthetics and production of visual meaning. This is important to highlight because of the recurrence and significance of the term *alam* in the interviews with Jendela of how this idea is embedded into their worldview, aesthetics and artworks. The concept of *alam* is twofold. Firstly, it is known as *alam lahirnya*, which refers to knowledge acquired through the outer world, and secondly, *alam batinnya* which is also referred to as *rasa*, a tool to apprehend inner realities. First, a discussion on what *alam* means and where it is located in Minang poetics.

In discussing *alam* which comes from the archetypal proverb *Alam Minangkabau*, the author's initial understanding of what *alam* means comes from a conversation with Yunizar on this axiom found in the written work of A.A Navis, a prominent Minang author and poet. "A.A Navis was not just referring to *alam* as the physical realm, in my view it was also about the realm of the mind and senses."⁷² *Alam* as knowledge would mean, "learning from our world, if we are Sumatrans who migrated to Java, then we must learn how to adapt to their ways."⁷³ A critical understanding of *alam* could be found in Katherine Bruhn's essay which described

⁷² Yunizar, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 1 December 2019, MPEG-4, 01:13:03-01:13:31.

"A.A. Navis kan bukan alam ini yang dimaksud, bukan alam fisik dalam pengertian di sini. Kalau saya lihat, dia melihatnya alam pikiran. Saya mengartikan begitu."

⁷³ Yunizar, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 1 December 2019, MPEG-4, 01:14:19-01:14:44.

"Bisa, bisa ada kaitan. "Alam takambang jadi guru" tahu kan? Kita belajar dari lingkungan, tempat kita hidup. Kalau orang Sumatra pindah ke Jawa ya hidup dengan cara orang Jawa, gitu."

alam origins from the Arabic word *‘ilm*, as a multi-dimensional term to signify knowledge in all its facets of making, receiving and giving, as well in its sensorial faculties of perception, emotions and experience.⁷⁴ It is from *‘ilm* that the term *alam* or “world” emerges thus signifying the genesis of the act of creation is rooted in knowledge.⁷⁵ To turn from the outer realms of knowing, *alam lahirnya*, to the inner realities of *alam batinya* known as *rasa*, we begin with comments by Jumaldi of why *rasa* prefigures in the work of Minang artists,

So it’s like this because we don’t have a visual art culture, when our modern predecessors migrated to Java, they started with what they saw. Considering the history of fine art, modern art, especially abstract, it was started by Minang people, because they had no visual burden. So Oesman Effendi, Zaini, they don’t have that - all they have is *rasa*. So, in visual art terms they have no resources. For example, if one is from Minang, there is a Minang style. If it’s Bali, they have it. For our generation, it was easy to spot our Balinese peers, their works would contain either *Barong*, or *Poleng*, the black and white fabric. “Wow, the Balinese”. They have those elements. *Rajas* or symbols of Balinese sacred knowledge.⁷⁶

With reference to Jumaldi’s point on Minang artists’ employment of *rasa*, it can be gathered *rasa* refers variably to a sensation, a process of emotional flavour, a mood, an emotional tone, an essential element within a work of art described as “a

⁷⁴ Katherine Bruhn, *Landscape Legacies: Visualizing Alam Minangkabau* (Singapore: Gajah Gallery, 2018), 40.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Jumaldi Alfi, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 30 November 2019, MPEG-4, 00:12:48-00:13:59.

“Mungkin ada. Jadi gini, memang karena kita tidak punya kebudayaan *visual art*, ketika bapak-bapak kita itu pindah ke Jawa, mereka *start* nya dengan apa yang memang mereka lihat. Kalau dalam sejarah seni rupa, seni modern itu, terutama abstrak, dimulai oleh orang-orang Minang, karena mereka tidak mempunyai beban visual. Jadi Oesman, Zaini, mereka tidak punya – yang mereka punya cuma *rasa*. Jadi visualnya mereka tidak punya tabungan, misalnya dari Minang, ada *style* Minang. Kalau Bali, mereka ada. Angkatan kita dulu paling gampang lihat anak Bali itu gambarnya kalau tidak Barong, terus gambarnya Poleng, kain yang hitam putih itu. “Wah anak Bali”. Ada unsur-unsur itu. Raja-raja atau simbol mantra Bali.”

contemplative abstraction in which the inwardness of human feelings suffuses the surrounding world of embodied forms.”⁷⁷ Instead of a rigorous interpretation of the theory of *rasa* in the classical Indian treatise on aesthetics, it would be more suitable to explore *rasa* in Indonesian terms closer to the cultural context of *Jendela* arising from the meaning of *alam* that is synonymous with knowledge of the outer and inner worlds. On such source is Paul Stange’s discussion on the “Logic of Rasa in Java”,

Though in Indonesia ‘ilmu’ now closely closely approximates Western senses of ‘knowledge,’ the term clearly refers to gnosis, to a mystical or spiritual form of knowledge that is not just intellectual but also intuitive. Another way of clarifying what is meant by ‘ilmu’ is that, in the end, it is the whole body, and all organs within it, rather than just the mind that ‘knows’.⁷⁸

Through Stange’s focus on *rasa* to “know” how intuition is processed, perceived and understood, he highlights this is achieved by “not simply increasing awareness of feeling” but rather by heightening “awareness through feeling” evoked through meditative conditioning of the mind and body to transition from “thought centered” to “feeling centred” in a commitment of total surrender.⁷⁹ This is my understanding of *rasa* that is synonymous with the concept of *alam lahirnya*, that is by becoming attuned to the inner sensations, one is able transcend consciousness and thus opening up new pathways of seeing and sensing the world, and in Stange’s words, “increasing openness with everyday life.” This idea of embracing *alam lahirnya* and

⁷⁷ Rasa Indian aesthetic theory, Britannica Encyclopaedia, accessed 25 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/art/rasa>.

⁷⁸ Paul Stange, “The Logic of Rasa in Java,” *Indonesia Cornell University Southeast Asia Programme*, Vol. 038 (October 1984): 113-34.

⁷⁹ Stange cites a Sumarah practice for assessing *rasa* which begins with relaxation of the physical body and with the stilling of the senses and thoughts. In itself the shifting of attention from outer events and thoughts to releasing the tensions within the physical body implies a shift from thought to feeling. Stillness of the senses and thoughts in Sumarah terms does not mean “turning off” or “repression” but rather to enable an open and receptive state within which attention is not focused on thoughts.

alam batinnya is echoed in Rudi Mantofani's explication of the Minang proverb *Alam Terkembang Jadi Guru* (*Nature ever-expanding becomes Teacher*) and its relation to the production of meaning in artworks,

This phrase is a reflection of West Sumatra. It is not an Indonesian expression. This means that there is a specific understanding of why it is said in West Sumatra. If it has to do with Jendela, Nor and Theresia please pay attention, our origins are indeed people who learn not only from institutionalised knowledge. We learn from natural phenomena, natural instincts, then we try to communicate that to people. The proverb *Alam Terkembang Jadi Guru* (*Nature ever-expanding becomes Teacher*) is important in West Sumatra because there is a message firstly to understand the environment, and secondly, the principle 'from inside you not just from outside. The philosophy of these words is relevant to Jendela.⁸⁰

This notion of *alam lahirnya* and *alam batinnya* prefigures significantly in the nascent works of Jendela evident in the acute observation and sensitive reflection of the physical world around them at a time of great political and economic turmoil, but also by the artists' own admission, it concerns exploring the unseen inner worlds of their subconscious and intuition to tap into something more powerful and unrestrained for self-expression.

⁸⁰ Rudi Mantofani, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 1 December 2019, MPEG-4, 01:19:32-01:21:44.

"Maksud saya itu, itu kan dalam konteks Sumatra Barat, sebuah frase yang mencerminkan Sumatra Barat. Dalam bahasa Indonesia kan ngga ada. Artinya ada pemahaman khusus sebetulnya kenapa di Sumatra Barat diucapkan itu. Kalau ada hubungannya dengan Jendela, Nor dan Theresia bisa perhatikan, asal usul kita memang orang yang belajar tidak dari pengetahuan yang besar. Kita belajar dengan hal yang alami, nalurinya alamiah, baru kita coba membacanya ke orang. Kata-kata *Alam Takambang Jadi Guru* menjadi penting di Sumatra Barat karena ada pesan memahami lingkungannya, di mana dia berada, atau kedua, belajarlah dengan prinsip 'dari kamu', bukan dari luar. Filosofi kata-kata itu jadi relevan dengan teman-teman Jendela."

Political Contexts of Early Reformasi Indonesia

It has become clear a contextual understanding of the political is essential to understand Jendela's position and significance in Indonesian contemporary art. A discussion of Yogyakarta is necessary, for it was the birthing ground of Jendela at the cusp of Reformasi, and has a long and storied history of art collectives and political activism.

The significance of Jendela was the subject of debate by critics who felt the group's works, which privileged formal elements of art, lacked critical substance and thus failed to attain a point of resolution affirming their place in contemporary Indonesian art. Such critique reveals Jendela's poetic sensibilities and aesthetics were regarded within a myopic view that insisted on political-polemical art as a critical proposition. Jumaldi expressed similar sentiments,

We used to have questions from several people. During Reformasi, we were labelled as apolitical artists. But the problem is that we don't accept being branded like that. So, our politics are not what was expected by others. We remain political, but in our way. So, I said, we're not politicising art, and we're not making political art; but how we play with the notion of the political in art. So unlike friends who use politics as a visual, we inverse that – visually that's what we politicise. So, it's not the same as what our friends say, and then they end up saying 'wow this is apolitical'. That apolitical attitude is political in itself.⁸¹

⁸¹ Jumaldi Alfi, phone interview with the author, 13 October 2019, MPEG-4, 19:40-20:43.

"Dulu kami ada pertanyaan dari beberapa orang. Di jaman Reformasi, kami dicap sebagai seniman-seniman apolitis. Tapi persoalannya begini, kami tidak terima dicap seperti itu. Jadi, politik kami bukan seperti apa yang mereka ingini. Kami tetap berpolitik, tetapi dengan cara kami. Jadi saya bilang, kita bukannya mempolitisasi seni, dan kita tidak membuat seni politik; tetapi bagaimana politik dalam seni itu kita mainkan. Jadi berbeda dengan teman-teman yang menggunakan politik sebagai visualnya, kita terbalik – visual itulah yang kita politisasi. Sehingga tidak sama dengan apa yang teman-teman kita bilang, lalu akhirnya mereka bilang 'wah ini apolitis'. Sikap apolitis itu adalah politik sendiri."

Reformasi's Influence on Yogyakarta's Artists

Jendela emerged at a time when the country was in the throes of nationwide political reformation known as Reformasi, marked by the fall of President Suharto in 1998 that ended three decades of authoritarian period known as *Order Baru* or New Order. Triggered by the Asian financial crisis in 1997, the Indonesian currency devalued six-fold from Rp2,500 to Rp15,000 per US dollar plunging the country into economic free fall. It fanned the flames of growing public disaffection with the incumbent government's three-decade-long, deep-rooted corruption, collusion and nepotism, which erupted subsequently into violent social clashes. What ensued was a series of brutal assaults targeting minority groups such as ethnic Chinese communities, military killings of Trisakti University student demonstrators calling for democracy, and state-linked aggression against civilians. This series of events eventually led to President Suharto's forced resignation in May 1998, and an era of great social, political and artistic change.⁸² On the cultural and artistic front, contemporary urban artists demanded freedom of expression with a sense of urgency to incorporate Reformasi-related themes into their artworks.⁸³ In Ade Dermawan's essay "Fixing the Chain of Ideas" (part of a larger survey of contemporary art groups in Indonesia), Yogyakarta was described as a hotbed for new artists' groups who seized the opportunity to exercise their newfound freedom and express "novel orientations on how social, cultural and political lives should take." Jendela's inaugural exhibition was staged in Yogyakarta in 1997, just at the cusp of Reformasi in 1998; this was concurrent with the formation of several artists' collectives such as Apotik Komik in 1997, Taring Padi in 1998 and mes56 in 2002.

⁸² Good, Mary-Jo DelVecchio, Good Byron J., "Indonesia Sakit: Indonesian Disorders and the Subjective Experience and Interpretive Politics of Contemporary Indonesian Artists," in *Postcolonial Disorders*, ed. Good Mary-Jo DelVecchio, Good Byron J., Hyde Sandra Teresa, and Pinto Sarah, University of California Press (2008): 62-108. Accessed 6 July 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pn9nx.6.

⁸³ Tod Jones, "Indonesian Cultural Policy in the Reform Era," *Indonesia Cornell University Southeast Asia Programme*, Vol. 93 (April 2012): 184.

The aforementioned art groups contemporaneous with Jendela actively engaged with local political and societal content to produce art in ephemeral media such as photography, video screening, performance, public art, street art and social engagement collectively.⁸⁴

Unlike their contemporaries, however, Jendela had a different approach. Instead of expressing themselves through overt political commentary, they produced works of art that explored complexities of the human condition through depictions of the everyday and the ordinary in paintings and sculpture. Jendela's artistic attitude may seem off tangent to the art groups in Yogyakarta whose practices were clearly aligned with political engagement for reform and revolution, or direct social commentary on Indonesian politics and social issues.

This strong correlation of art and politics in Yogyakarta is, according to Indonesian historian Antariksa, an outcome of a city with a long and storied history of art collectives and political activism since Indonesia's post-independence in the 1950s. Yogyakarta was referred to as the 'Revolution Capital' as it was once a centre for the Republican leadership and youth guerrillas to fend off the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (NICA) forces as part of the Indonesian National Revolution fight for independence from colonial Dutch rule from 1945 - 49. Therefore, the art communes known as *sanggars*, such as *Seniman Indonesia Muda* (Young Artists of Indonesia) and *Pelukis Rakyat* (People's Painters), which emerged during this period carried the spirit of nationalism fostered by Sukarno, the republic's first President and leader of the Indonesian struggle for independence.⁸⁵ The early *sanggars* shared a strong spirit of solidarity where artists lived and worked together, shared resources,

⁸⁴ Ade Dermawan, "Fixing the Chain of Ideas," in *Exhibition of Alternative Spaces and Art Groups in Indonesia*, ed. Ardi Yunanto (Jakarta: North Art Space, 2010), 14-19.

⁸⁵ Antariksa, "Between Revolution Stronghold and Laboratory of the West: Political Positions in Indonesian Fine Arts in the 50's," in *Contemporaneity: Contemporary Art in Indonesia*, ed. Biljana Ciric (Shanghai: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010), 1-6.

staged exhibitions and sustained their practice through sale of artworks at art fairs. Moreover, the early *sanggars* played a vital role in the development of art in Indonesia as senior artists provided tutelage for young artists at the Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia (Academy of Fine Arts Indonesia), which was the precursor of present-day ISI, and the Institut Teknologi Bandung (Bandung Institute of Technology). Noteworthy *sanggar* artists-educators S.Sudjojono, Affandi and Hendra Gunawan did not only impart knowledge on artistic skills but also inculcated the importance of political consciousness. Regarded as founding figures of modern Indonesian art, their place in Indonesia's art historical canon was cemented in extraordinary paintings of troops, refugees, civilians and self-portraits that serve as social documentary in the fight for independence. As a result the art of Yogyakarta, generally associated with nationalism and socialism, has always been regarded as an anchor of Indonesian modernity, as well as a dialectical polar to the art of Bandung which specialise in formalist experimentations informed by internationalist movements.⁸⁶

Such opposing positions and tensions are replayed again at the time of Jendela's emergence marked by Reformasi in the late 1990s, where there was a prevailing attitude by artists to engage with urgent socio-political issues confronting Indonesian society, and reject art which had become symbolic of cultural hegemony and artistic suppression of the preceding era defined by Suharto's New Order regime from the 1970s-90s.⁸⁷ The New Order regime led by Suharto was established after the overthrow of Sukarno in 1965 resulting in state sanctioned art that focused on traditional, particularly Javanese, arts and crafts, in the forms of *wayang* (theatre), *batik* (textile) and *gamelan* (musical) as these arts served larger strategic purposes of

⁸⁶ Ahmad Mashadi, "Jendela: Aspects of Debates and Art History," in *Jendela: A Play of the Ordinary*, National University of Singapore Museum, ed. Ahmad Mashadi and Enin Supriyanto (Singapore: NUS Museum, 2009), 6.

⁸⁷ Susan Ingham, "Alternative art and infrastructure in Indonesia in the 1990s," (PhD diss., University of New South Wales, 2007), 61.

galvanising a national and cultural unity, and present an uncontentious image for tourism and economic purpose. At the same time, politically charged art or art that implied criticism of the regime was suppressed by the authorities, and abstract, formal art was favoured instead for it was perceived to be politically neutral and supported enthusiastically by an expanding, voracious art market. It was a time when artistic expression was heavily policed and did not find an adequate outlet in Indonesia until after the fall of Suharto in 1998.⁸⁸

An alternative viewpoint of biased positions on political art in Indonesia is Jeffrey Hadler's critique of cultural historians who romanticise revolutionary artists of Sukarno's Old Order era of the 1950s-60s. They were exposed as beneficiaries of state sponsorship who perished for their political beliefs but disregarded politically neutral artists who came into prominence during Suharto's New Order regime from the 1970s-90s. In crystallising this argument, he referred to the art of Nashar, a modern art predecessor of Jendela from Sumatra who was decried as decorative and attacked for failing to conform to revolutionary dogmas by the Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (LEKRA) known as Institute for the People's Culture, which was a prolific literary, artistic and social movement associated with PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia), the Indonesian Communist Party. By the early 1960s, non-revolutionary art was censored, and non-revolutionary artists persecuted. Abstract art and experimental poetry were marginalised and stifled. Nashar, together with leading non-communist intellectuals, became a signatory of *Manifes Kebudayaan* known as 'Cultural Manifesto' advocating artistic freedom in the face of dominant state-sponsored "revolutionary" art. Signatories paid dearly for they were silenced, forced out of teaching positions, forbidden from exhibiting or publishing their work.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Susan Ingham, "Indonesian Art, Entering the Global," in *Contemporaneity: Contemporary Art in Indonesia*, ed. Biljana Ciric (Shanghai: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010), 80-88.

⁸⁹ Jeffrey Hadler, "Night Letters: The Ambiguous Archive of Soeharto's New Order (1968-1977)," in *Kyoto-Berkeley Seminar on Indonesia* (Kyoto: Kyoto University Rakuyu Kaikan, 2014), 56-66.

Notwithstanding the range of perspectives both analytical and nuanced in the dialectical polarities of social realist and formalist positions in Indonesian art, this chapter has discussed how the political lies in the contexts in which art was created, whereby the significance of art is intrinsic to the complicity of the artists working within those contexts. In unpacking Jendela through the lens of the political in the contemporary and art historical contexts of Yogyakarta, we see how the intersections of historical, political, and artistic spheres created a space in Yogyakarta where matters of agency and subjectivity were foregrounded, engaged by artists alike, and Jendela was no exception.

Through the movements of artists groups calling for and exercising their freedom of expression, in my view Jendela demonstrated a commitment to the spirit of their times through art exalting their individuality. I agree with Rudi on Jendela's stance that the polemical style of political art was unsuitable for defining their aesthetics, and to emphasise Rudi's point, I refer to Bleiker again, who said, "The most significant political potential of the aesthetic is thus not located where one would suspect it at first: in politically committed art. Overtly committed art forms often do no more than promote a particular position. They may be political, yes, but not aesthetically so."⁹⁰ This debate presents a view of how artists working in heightened political atmospheres were making sense of the turbulences and transformations of their time through art in diverse ways. There were artists who expressed themselves more explicitly and actively through direct commentary and social engagement, and there were also others like Jendela, who became more introspective and conveyed personal reflections through poetry and nuance.

Given the semantic and allegoric richness of Jendela's practice, the subsequent chapters will examine early works of the group in thematic categories through which connections of the political in the poetic will become visible.

⁹⁰ Roland Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 8.

Mediated by these referents, the next chapters will investigate the ways in which Jendela employs the forms and systems drawn from the proverbial culture of their Minangkabau roots to bring fresh perspectives to present challenges by which the works remain open fields of signification rather than direct political statements. These will be presented in the chapter of *Coretan (Transient Lines)* which shows how Jendela emulates and expresses lines to comment on the tensions of the time. The chapter *Bayangan Bentuk (Allusion of Form)* will draw upon material and form loaded with everyday, social experience, and the chapter *Jiwa Ketok (Visible Soul)* will explore the representations of the body as a metaphor to mirror the anxieties, uncertainties and realities of the time.

CHAPTER 3

Coretan (Transient Lines)

This chapter considers the political significance of Jendela's formal explorations in lines and words through the act of writing known as *coretan*. These works represent the group's independent artistic position invoking *rasa*, their 'inner world' of emotions, intuition and imagination, to express tensions during a politically unstable period. In both the content and process of *coretan*, the artists layered their experiences, perspectives and observations of a time defined by political change with their own sensorial and emotional responses. Discussing *coretan* is significant because it is the foundational visual metaphor which permeates the works of the group, and thus essentially encapsulates and articulates the political.

Coretan is commonly known as "writing in scribbles" in Indonesian expression. However, I shall refer to its definition in Bahasa Indonesia on image-making and meaning-making to foreground my discussions on the political resonance of this art style as used by Jendela. The first definition, "*garis-garis yang tidak menentu*" speaks of "lines that are not absolute", and the second, "*gambaran atau cerita ringkas tentang sesuatu*" refers to "sketches of stories and images about the unknown or unfamiliar". These metaphorical and subconscious undercurrents of what *coretan* are, drive the aims of this chapter to illuminate how Jendela's way of expressing scepticism and unsettling examinations of reality against a backdrop of political transformations were expressed through such undefined, ambiguous compositions. To describe this style of art by Jendela, I employ the term *coretan* from the title of Yunizar's solo exhibition at the National University of Singapore Museum in 2007. According to the exhibition notes, it was "a series which began in the 1990s composed of illegible scribbling and lines that appear as fragments of text, a diary-like parchment of thoughts that struggles to find form or intelligible

representation.”⁹¹ What had been described as *coretan* in Yunizar’s paintings is also evident in the early compositions of Jendela, characterised by fragments of scribbled handwritten words and lines deployed in the rudimentary elements of jots, dots, dashes, lines, doodles and scratches. Layers of lines and words emerge through gestural marks of paint in washes of muted tones or smeared colours, exerting a disquieting yet powerful presence.

The chapter opens with a discussion of Handiwirman’s aesthetic breakthrough in the determination of form through his search for the perfect line capable of conveying the purity of expression. It shall introduce homeless Suyar’s writing on the wall which propelled Handiwirman’s search through an ascetic condition of mind and body. The abstract outpourings of Handiwirman’s struggles in determining form are reflected in the lives of people he encountered who live on the fringes of society. Next, this chapter examines Yunizar’s repeated handwritten lines of words in standardised order but lacking commentary or meaning in *Surat Perintah* (*Warrant Letter*). By presenting a stream of incongruent words with no clear resolution, the work is a metaphor for the futility of authoritarian attempts at exerting any real power or control.

Jendela’s *coretan* style that attempts to destabilise distinctions between writing and drawing by deliberately obscuring words to the point of illegibility and incomprehension, can be argued as political. In attempting to regulate and delineate signification by rebuilding deconstructed language into gestural lines, marks, and scratches using paint on canvas, Jendela was making a political statement by questioning the primacy of language structures and denying coherence. To understand the political significance of such acts, I refer to Johanna Halt’s essay *Cy*

⁹¹ Ahmad Mashadi, introduction to *Coretan: Recent Works by Yunizar*, by National University of Singapore Museum (Singapore: National University Singapore Museum, 2007), 5.

Twombly: Sign, Meta Sign and Sense that identified the thoughts by Martine Reid's views on the visibility and illegibility in art. She wrote,

Illegibility writing shows things to be what they are not. That is why it is "sanctioned" by whatever means possible (by various authorities, from school on). It is accused of trying to hide something," read as a "gesture of refusal, as antisocial."⁹²

The proposition here is positioned in dialogue with the scholars who weighed in on the critical significance of *coretan* to produce meaning and form through strategies of illegibility and abstraction. Aminudin Siregar suggested such works of art "parody our approach to literature; or a parody of our interpretive system in the art world which has been superficial in making meaning of artwork." The result of which is to "reflect the subversion of signs around us."⁹³ Aminudin's point on the *coretan*'s dissociative meaning is not uncommon in literary art forms such as poetry, and here Ahmad Mashadi has drawn parallels to Yunizar's *coretan* with the work of Indonesian poet Sutardji Calzoum Bachri whose poetic mantra pieces known to dissociate words from the "burden of meaning and privileging their aural and ritualistic qualities" have been described as having "an incantation like-quality of the old Indonesian *dukun*, chants stemming from Indonesian pre-Islamic practices, still used today."⁹⁴

Such sentiments are echoed in the thoughts of Jendela in overcoming the challenges of determining form, since they did not come from a constitution with a

⁹² Johanna Malt, *Cy Twombly: Sign, Meta-Sign and Sense*, Sillages critiques 2016, accessed 23 December 2019, <https://journals.openedition.org/sillagescritiques/4671>.

⁹³ Aminudin T.H. Siregar, "Unreadable Letters" in *Coretan: Recent Works by Yunizar* (Singapore: National University Singapore Museum, 2007), 35.

⁹⁴ Muhammad Haji Salleh, "Oral elements in contemporary Indonesian poetry," *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 19 (March 1991): 3-18.

strong visual tradition. To explain how *coretan* was developed Handiwirman described the labours of their modern art predecessors from Sumatra, comparing the experience of his seniors with the established school of Bandung, that is renowned for its abstract art training based on Western theory.⁹⁵

In my opinion, art taught in Bandung is academically focused so aesthetics is formed from theory. Whereas in Sumatra, the process for an artist like Nashar is different. Using the analogy of thirst, if I am an artist in Bandung learning art from Europe and feeling thirsty, my thirst will be immediately quenched because I will be readily ‘spoonfed’ with instruction but no other experience will be given. However, for my Sumatran seniors, if I am thirsty, they will tell me to keep walking instead of giving me water right away. When I get very thirsty, they will make me walk again, pointing to me the direction. The journey makes me so thirsty, that when I finally find water, I drink twice as much. My seniors did not give themselves a title or anything, they did not make statements, but they had it. They had a strong spirit and intuition.⁹⁶

Similarly, Jendela’s beginnings with *coretan* did not happen in the confines of the classroom or the studio, but rather through the experiences of life evocative of the qualities of *rasa*. In the group’s search for something original, deeper and meaningful, they became intrigued by the actions of an eccentric, homeless man

⁹⁵ In Yvonne Spielmann *Contemporary Indonesian Art: Artists, Art Spaces and Collectors*, the art academy in Bandung that is referred to is part of the Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB), one of Indonesia’s most prestigious universities and is known for its tutelage and specialisation in Western art movements.

⁹⁶ Handiwirman Saputra, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, MPEG-4, 01:46:45-1:48:41. “Kalau menurut saya, di Bandung memang secara akademis diajarkan. Jadi estetika terbentuk dari teori. Sedangkan di Sumatra, memang seperti ungkapan Nashar, prosesnya berbeda. Menurut penilaian saya, terlalu dingin untuk melihat karya dari Bandung itu sebagai, apa ... Nah itu kayak saya haus, dikasih air, udah, lepas hausnya, selesai. Tapi kalau senior saya dari Sumatra itu: saya haus, dia suruh saya jalan lagi, ngga ngasih air langsung. Sampai saya benar-benar haus, dia suruh saya jalan lagi, ditunjukkan jalannya. Perjalanan itu membuat saya ketemu air itu dua kali lipat rasanya, hausnya itu, air itu masuk, saya dapat dua kali lipat ini. Seperti itu jadinya. Nah di Bandung itu, apalagi yang seni kita pelajari dari Eropa, seperti itu. Kamu haus, dikasih air, itupun diminumin lagi. Jadi ngga dikasih pengalaman lain. Gitu sih kalau menurut saya, jadi senior saya lebih deket sebetulnya untuk, apa – walaupun ngga tau, dia pun ngga ngasih judul atau apa, tapi punya, dapat – bukan pernyataan, tapi rasanya.”

known as Suyar, who was writing all over the walls of the college campus and town. For Jendela, Suyar embodied a ‘purity of expression’ because his actions were of a free man unburdened by motivations of allegiances, ambition or societal conventions. For Jendela, Suyar was the ideal meta-artist, able to build a language uniquely his own, a complex system of signs and myth unknowable to anyone but himself. Jumaldi recounts the experience,

At that time there was a crazy person near our campus, and he was painting on a wall. Writing on the wall. Then we see, wow this is what it is like to be an artist, pure, without burden, and to write anything. Now from there we might pick up, some aspect of the visual and emotions. How he is free to work without burdens? At that time, there were a lot of illustrations with great stories even but the works were actually ordinary though the stories were big. This is what it is about politics. How come the work is so ordinary but the story so ‘great’?⁹⁷

Though *coretan* emerges out of the textual and the poetical, remarks by Jumaldi and Handiwirman suggest it is connected to the artists’ experiences, emotions, intuition and imagination enacted as mark making. Such viewpoints further develop the arguments for the political significance of *coretan* as an embodiment of the everyday and the expression of lived experience.

⁹⁷ Jumaldi Alfi, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 30 November 2019, MPEG-4, 52:59-53:43.

“Waktu itu ada orang gila di dekat kampus kita, dan dia nggambarin tembok. Nulis di tembok. Terus kita ngelihat, wah itu kayaknya ya jadi seniman kayak gitu lah, murni, tanpa beban, nulis apa aja. Nah dari sana mungkin kita memunguti, ada yang mungkin secara visualnya, ada yang mungkin secara rasanya. Bagaimana dia bebas berkarya, tanpa diisi beban-beban. Saat itu kan orang banyak ilustrasi, maksudnya membebani karyanya dengan cerita-cerita yang – padahal karyanya biasa aja, tapi ceritanya gede-gede. Ini maksudnya begini begini tentang politik. Padahal kita lihat, karyanya biasa-biasa, tapi kok ceritanya besar ya.”

Handiwirman Saputra *Untitled Landscape*

Figure 3. Handiwirman Saputra, “Untitled,” 1998, Oil on canvas, 145 x 195 cm. In *The Philip Morris Group of Companies: ASEAN Art Awards 1998*, Hanoi: Hanoi Fine Arts College and Ho Chi Minh Fine Arts Museum, 1998. Image courtesy of Gajah Gallery Singapore.

Several key features of the poetical with political resonances are embodied in this abstract, untitled landscape by Handiwirman (Figure 3). These include the manner in which Handiwirman’s aesthetic search for his own unique *coretan* or lines arose from his struggles on the fringes of society; his artistic decision to make art based on his ‘inner world’ and the ‘everyday’ instead of following popular political art trends at the time; and in mirroring his visual language with artforms of marginalised persons that do not follow the conventions and institutions of art. This visual language was explored in an interview with the artist which referenced his formal education. According to Handiwirman, he, unlike the other members of Jendela, was not a fine art major, but was instead a specialist in the artisanal discipline of woodwork and metalwork, as he felt more technically than artistically inclined.

Though he did not possess knowledge of fine art painting, he was curious to understand how visual language in art was developed, and how through such visual language, one becomes uniquely an artist. Handiwirman felt this visual language should be original, deep, truthful to oneself and not simply an imitation or appropriation of art movements of style. In an unpublished interview with Tony Godfrey in 2009, Handiwirman said,

The things that attracted me most were actually the actions of a crazy man, homeless man by the name of Suyar. He wrote on the walls, and that sparked my first interest. I really felt the form of his expression. I felt it made the “purity of expression” I saw on campus seem questionable. That was how I got attracted and moved over to painting... I didn’t know how, but I just did it. Using paper, using whatever I wanted.⁹⁸

Ten years later in an interview with the author, Handiwirman spoke again of Suyar as a source of inspiration when the question on Suyar’s effect on the artist was posed by the author.

So, in fact almost all of us used to talk about him. In my opinion, it was not Suyar’s writing that was interesting, but rather how he arranged words not as sentences. We could not even try to guess what he had wanted to say. From there, I began to learn, but by guessing – all the questions we had, the answer was *maybe*. Maybe he had to empty himself of everything, you know. So I tried... It was very difficult at that time, right? To empty out, let go of everything, that was also difficult. Then I understood that it can’t just be copied... like, looking at the picture and then we copy it – that’s not how it works. So, the initial decision at that time was that I had to be him. In my

⁹⁸ Handiwirman Saputra, interview by Tony Godfrey, 2009, interview transcript: 2.

thinking too, I tried to see the good in what other people think was not good. I would do that everyday – I slept carelessly, to be in his frame of mind. It was not only the visuals that I chased after, but physically, I got his thoughts too.⁹⁹

In his search for his own inner script - his inner *coretan* - Handiwirman sought to embody the spirit of Suyar by living ascetically, devoid of routine, for two years starting in 1998 (the same year Reformasi started.) It was a liberating rite of passage for Handiwirman who travelled cross-country by road spontaneously witnessing and experiencing interactions with ordinary folk.¹⁰⁰

At that time I went back (to Sumatra, 1998) by bus, and the bus did not have front lights. From here (Yogyakarta) to Sumatra, it took me about three to four days. It was a difficult time – so the bus would tailgate another bus in front of it, then when it couldn't catch up, the bus would stop again. So that's how it was, '98 – I didn't take part in the demonstrations, but I got the experience through everyday encounters. Not taking a bath, even the bus wouldn't stop at (eateries). The bus would stop at someone's house, who would cook and feed everyone on the bus. But I could still enjoy it, actually, so I didn't think it was hardship. But I was reminded of the reality by a parent

⁹⁹ Handiwirman Saputra, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, MPEG-4, 00:06:43-00:08:20. "Jadi sebenarnya kita hampir semua sering membicarakan dia. Kalau menurut saya sih, bukan tulisan Suyar nya yang menarik, tetapi bagaimana dia bisa menyusun kata, tapi tidak bisa dijadikan kalimat. Ngga bisa diarahin ke mana, dia bercerita apa, itu ngga. Dari situ, saya mulai belajar, tapi dengan *mungkin* – pertanyaan itu jawabannya *mungkin*. Mungkin dia harus mengosongkan dulu semua, gitu lho. Itu dicoba... Sangat sulit waktu itu kan? Untuk mengosongkan, melepas semua, itu kan juga susah. Terus aku mengambilnya jadi ngga bisa cuma dengan ditiru... Jadi lihat gambar, terus kita tiru, itu ngga bisa. Jadi keputusan awal waktu itu aku harus menjadi dia. Jadi berpikirnya juga, aku juga berusaha melihat apa yang menurut orang ngga bagus menjadi terlihat bagus. Jadi sehari-harinya aku juga gitu, tidur sembarangan, untuk mendapatkan pemikiran dia, bukan cuma visualnya yang aku kejar, tetapi secara fisik, secara pemikiran aku dapatkan."

¹⁰⁰ In the author's interview with Handiwirman in 2019 discussing his ruminations on political demonstrations he was witnessing that were taking place at the time, in comparison to his experience travelling by bus for four days from Yogyakarta to Sumatra. A revelation came to him when he met a parent on the long bus ride with his two kids in tow who said to him bewildered "You seem ok. I here bring two young kids." It was then that Handiwirman realised what real hardship actually was.

who had their two kids in tow. They said, “You are alone, so it’s okay. I have two children with me.” I then realised that the situation was difficult indeed.¹⁰¹

Through Handiwirman’s account, it can be seen that the development of his visual style was not a direct result of the larger political atmosphere, but through his experiences of features and factors symptomatic of the politics of the time. This was embodied in Suyar, the main protagonist in Jendela’s *coretan* story whose disenfranchised status brought to light individuals at the fringes of societal limits in terms of economic, social and political ordering. Handiwirman’s emulation of Suyar’s sensibilities in the negation of societal conventions indicates his artistic position in favour of everyday lived experiences by which the purity of expression he was trying to achieve was derived from a more grounded sense of reality.

Detail of abstract landscape. Left close-up shows textual fragments and fragmented lines of *coretan*. Right close-up show lines signifying the horizon and houses on the horizon plane were destabilised by way of crudely drawn borders in roughened textures and hasty washes of colour adding further to the painting’s unsettling atmosphere.

¹⁰¹ Handiwirman Saputra, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, MPEG-4, 00:22:07 – 00:23:51.

“Waktu itu kan jaman susah – iya, jadi bus itu ngikutin kalau ada bus lain di depan jalan, lalu kalo sudah ketinggalan, berhenti lagi. Jadi gitu sih, ‘98 – aku ngga ikut demo demo, tapi pengalamannya lebih dapat di sehari-harinya. Ngga mandi, makan pun juga bus nya ngga berhenti di (rumah makan). Bus nya berhenti di rumah orang, laku dimasakin, terus makan semuanya yang di bus. Tapi aku masih bisa menikmati, sebetulnya, jadi ngga dipikir ini kesusahan. Tapi diingatin sama orang tua, dia bawa anak dua. Dia bilang “Kamu sendiri itu gak apa apa. Aku bawa anak dua.” Barulah aku sadar kalau keadaan itu susah, sulit.”

Such experiences manifested in this abstract landscape work marked a turning point in Handiwirman's artistic trajectory in the determination of form. It is seen and felt in the undefined, fragmented painted lines that emerged from an exaltation of the artist's peripheral state, which mirrored the experiences of marginalised persons he had encountered in this quest to find a form of artistic truth. Encounters and events are transfigured into textual fragments on the painting as a way to sanctify the importance of non-descript daily events and persons. Yet, the obfuscated, illegible textual elements allude to the obscured individuals who do not fall into the conventional sense of societal or political ordering. When viewed in its entirety, this sense of distortion is felt through the landscape rendition in dark, murky earthy tones carried out in a brusque un-painterly manner. Lines signifying the horizon and houses on the horizon plane were destabilised by way of crudely drawn borders in roughened textures and hasty washes of colour adding further to the painting's unsettling atmosphere. Viewed in the political context of its time, the painting's disconcerting appearance embodied in the abrasive fragments of *coretan* could suggest a sense of desolation, reflected in so far in stories of human struggles that underline this work.

To present a different aspect of *coretan*, this discussion will now turn to Yunizar's *Surat Perintah (Warrant Letter)* which shows a more detached and ironic take on the engagement and correlation of the political, the textual and power.

Yunizar *Surat Perintah (Warrant Letter)*

In discussing *coretan* as a conceptual and aesthetic cornerstone of Jendela's politically significant practice, Yunizar's *Surat Perintah (Warrant Letter)* (Figure 4) is noteworthy for employing strategies of illegibility in the process of writing and image making. This work completed in 1998 coincides with the same year Reformasi began and so it could be suggested that connotations of the political that allude to ideas of command and control transpired in this title and subject of the work. Political undercurrents can be discerned. This proposition is echoed by Parveen Sandhu, an applied linguistics scholar, who said "Coming from Sumatra to live and study in Yogyakarta, Yunizar was linguistically and culturally the outsider – a status that fine-tuned his sensitivities to language as a powerful but delicate tool..."¹⁰² Yunizar's relationship with art in the written form starts when he was at *Sekolah Menengah Seni Rupa* (High School for Fine Arts in Padang, Sumatra), a school attended by most members of Jendela.¹⁰³ He left Sumatra for Yogyakarta to further his studies as a painting major at the arts college (ISI) and recalled the tutelage by artist Fadjar Sidik who is well known for abstractions that referred to calligraphy and patterning based on Islamic art¹⁰⁴. Though Yunizar did not mention any direct influence by Fadjar, there are nevertheless elements of patterning and calligraphy in his practice. Yunizar was interested in Arabic script and later works in the group's exhibition *Biasa (Ordinary)* in 2005 did show such elements. However, it was the form of Arabic script rather than an attempt to consciously create some legible or coherent meaning that

¹⁰² Parveen Sandhu, "Yunizar's Recent Works: Using Text to Create a Collective Narrative" in *Coretan: Recent Works by Yunizar* (Singapore: National University Singapore Museum, 2007), 25.

¹⁰³ For high school, Rudi and Handiwirman like Yunizar attended Sekolah Menengah Seni Rupa (High School for Visual Arts) in Sumatra. Jumaldi, on the other hand, attended the High School for Visual Arts in Yogyakarta, due to his family's relocation.

¹⁰⁴ Yunizar, interview by Tony Godfrey, 2009, interview transcript: 2.

"I began making art when I was nineteen. I went to Jogja because there was no art school in Sumatra: I would have come here anyway because of Jogja's reputation as a city of art. I was taught by Agus Kamal, Sudiak Risman and Farjar Shidick. They were OK as teachers but Farjar, who is now dead, was also a good artist: he made abstractions that referred to Islamic calligraphy and patterning. In the academy we were taught Western, Eastern and Indonesian art history."

motivated the artist.¹⁰⁵ Yet we will see how it carried political resonances in the work *Surat Perintah (Warrant Letter)*. There is very little discourse and commentary of the work made available publicly, so the discussion of this work is based primarily on remarks by Yunizar made during the interviews with the author.

Figure 4. Yunizar, “Surat Perintah (Warrant Letter),” 1999, Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 95 cm. In Sotheby’s Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Paintings Sale, 6 October 2008.

Image from:

<https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.805.html/2>.

(Accessed 20 July 2019).

¹⁰⁵ Yunizar, interview by Tony Godfrey, 2009, interview transcript: 3.

“I have a few works that are inspired by, and some may associate with the Arabic scripts. I may play with the visuals of the Arabic font, but it is illegible. I’d like to add that even though I’m not an Arab, I am still compelled by the Arabic font. It is form of calligraphy that is devoid of meaning, that is not intelligible, but playing more on the level of visuals and aesthetics.”

Surat Perintah (Warrant Letter) is physically much larger than what one expects of an usual letter. Stretching up to one and half metres in height, its scale amplifies the effect and intimacy of a handwritten letter into a statement piece. It beckons viewers with its compositional density of looping, energetic cursive writing, scrawled horizontal lines that run nervously from edge to edge of the painting, interspersed with crossed out letterforms, scratchings, and rudimentary illustrations of everyday items like fruit, and boats. In the centre of the painting, looms a drawing of a mysterious human face of unknown identity. Yunizar describes the idea behind this,

Yes, like that, orders come from top to bottom, right. From superiors to subordinates, that's a warrant. From the bottom up, there's no such thing, right? We can see that. Visually it looks like writing but it couldn't be read, I gave the title "Warrant". If the order is written, it must be carried out. Even though it can't be read.¹⁰⁶

To get a sense of how the political is emerging from the poetical in *Surat Perintah (Warrant Letter)*, we turn to comments made by Syed Muhammad Hafiz a curator researching the socio-political histories of the Nusantara, who suggests Yunizar's textual exploration,

...touches on ideas of rationality and language. When I use the term "language", I use it in the broadest sense of the word. I mean "language" in terms of how one would read an artwork, and also "language" in the literal acoustic sense. When you come across articles that have been written about

¹⁰⁶ Yunizar, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 1 December 2019, MPEG-4, 00:01:50-00:02:47.

"Ya seperti itu, perintah dari atas ke bawah, gitu kan. Dari atasan ke bawahan, itulah surat perintah. Kalau dari bawah ke atas, ngga ada itu kan? Ya bisa begitu melihatnya. Cuma secara visual, seperti tulisan, tapi tidak bisa dibaca, saya kasi judul "Surat perintah". Apa ya – kalau perintah itu kan apapun bunyinya harus dilaksanakan. Meskipun tidak bisa dibaca."

Yunizar, the writings usually discuss how his works defy rationality and the structure or form of language.¹⁰⁷

This idea of defying rationality and structures of form, and language recall earlier remarks by Aminudin and Ahmad about Yunizar's *coretan* as disassociating meaning from words. This is evident in *Surat Perintah (Warrant Letter)* in how Yunizar first attempts to build an established order in the likeness of a grid structure that is achieved through the arrangement of running text, lines, and marks built up through renditions in paint and delicate washes of colour. At the same time, there is a sense of disjointedness between the larger surface area of running letterforms and interspersing imagery of fruit, boats and a head behind the words. This feeling of disassociation is further enhanced by showing line after line of letters repeated in similar order continuously in monotonous handscript without a narrative. To explicate the political significance behind Yunizar's deliberate textual distortions, Halt's interpretation of Reid's idea might be valid when she argued that "illegibility of this kind can be seen as a form of social resistance, as well as a confrontation with the limits of signification. It adopts the superficial appearance of conformity to accepted systems of communication and social interaction whilst actually refusing or subverting them."¹⁰⁸ When it comes to the artworks that display *coretan*, it can be stated that Jendela used fragmented textual components to synthesise their inner anxieties and commentary on the human experience conditioned by the greater context of political turmoil. By obscuring meaning and coherence in choosing to express themselves in this visual element, Jendela's *coretan* style may have political resonances because it does not correspond to common traditions of polemical, politically motivated art in Indonesia.

¹⁰⁷ Syed Muhammad Hafiz, "Yunizar's Untitled," accessed 13 August 2020, <https://objectlessons.space/Syed-Muhammad-Hafiz-on-Yunizar-s-Untitled>.

¹⁰⁸ Johanna Malt, *Cy Twombly: Sign, Meta-Sign and Sense*, Sillages critiques 2016, accessed 23 December 2019, <https://journals.openedition.org/sillagescritiques/4671>.

CHAPTER 4

Bayangan Bentuk (Allusion of Form)

The last chapter discussed the political resonances of lived experiences embedded in the ubiquitous elements of *coretan* that is lines and words. To continue this thesis' focus on the political dimensions of the quotidian, this chapter shall explore how it is encoded in everyday forms and ordinary materials. This chapter looks at works of art that are framed by the concept of *alam*, which translates to 'world' or 'nature' in Minang poetics which has an impact on the group's thoughts on how they perceive the daily as a means of revealing the political. *Bayangan Bentuk (Allusion of Form)* refers to allusions of the everyday that abound in Jendela's early works, allusions which provoke reflections on the political significance of often-overlooked and imperceptible forces governing life. To elucidate the political significance of the everyday, the thesis refers to Papastergiadis who said that paying attention to the "details of daily life can reveal an insight into the broader system."¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, by emphasising "ignored practices and things" are also ways to "correct skewed analytics of power that focus only on elites or structural power" for it reassess indoctrinated ideas that influence "our understanding of lives and the world."¹¹⁰ Therefore, this chapter also fulfils this thesis' overarching argument that Jendela's representation of the everyday in Indonesian life during the dramatic moments in history is politically significant, as it is an expression of the group's artistic autonomy that stands for the importance of the everyday instead of the exceptional.

¹⁰⁹ Niko Papastergiadis, *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place, and the Everyday* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2010), 24.

¹¹⁰ Xavier Guillaume and Jef Huysmans, "The concept of 'the everyday': Ephemeral politics and the abundance of life," accessed 28 November 2020, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0010836718815520>.

To demonstrate the political resonances of Jendela's poetic sensibilities, this chapter explores works of art underscored by the notion of *alam* that means 'world' or 'nature' – a concept of Minang poetics that has a bearing on the group's perspectives on how they interpret the everyday by which the political can reveal itself. Two conditions are of importance in appreciating Jendela's poetic affinity for the everyday. The first signals the group's cultural conditioning vis-a-vis their heightened consciousness of the environment as observers seeking to discern its appearance as well as fathom its hidden structures. The second is in invoking *alam batannya* or *rasa* by way of activating sensory awareness to overcome habitual thinking via aesthetic explorations in sensorial realms of intuition and imagination to generate a precise language for visceral expression. These poetic sensibilities innervating their practice and artworks will be discussed in this chapter to show how allusions of the everyday and ordinary reveal the unseen political forces governing life at large.

Developing on earlier discussions, I shall further unpack the idea of *alam* to focus on the relationship between the subtle, minute elements of life and the large-scale appearance of the world. In a quintessential text on *alam* by prominent Indonesian poet Ali Akbar Navis, the world is described as "nature" and regarded as a "teacher". This dualistic relationship between nature and nurture is embodied in the Minangkabau proverb "*Alam Terkembang Jadi Guru*", translated as "*Nature ever-expanding becomes Teacher*".¹¹¹ According to Professor A. Latif Hj Samian who specialises in philosophy of the Malay World, "the Minangkabaus believe that man is a 'student of nature'. It is by being a student of nature that he can fulfil his destiny to create the matrix of creativity."¹¹² *Alam* is described as 'terkembang' which means 'expanding'; this suggests the world, nature, like the cosmos is self-generating,

¹¹¹ Katherine Bruhn, *Landscape Legacies: Visualizing Alam Minangkabau* (Singapore: Gajah Gallery, 2018), 38.

¹¹² A. Latif Hj Samian, "Forces of the Cosmos in Alam Minangkabau: A Phenomenological Perspective," in *Analecta Husserliana: The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, volume CXV (New York: Springer, 2015), 244.

continuously changing and procreative. *Alam's* constant newness implies man's inability to grasp its absolute extent, by which the best way to acquire knowledge of it is to grant it status as teacher, a 'guru'. The term 'guru' connotes nature's nurturing faculty by which learning from nature can man be inspired.¹¹³

Such sentiments, philosophies and beliefs have been embraced by Jendela's modern art predecessor like Nashar who said in the letters of his para-fictional biography *Surat-Surat Malam (Night Letters)* written in a time of the "state's negation of history and repression of direct political discourse,"¹¹⁴

I am influenced by a particular motto: 'be one with nature'. I have interpreted this motto based on my own experience. For example, I train myself to think like this: I see a chair, I feel the shape of that chair, until a feeling emerges that I have become the chair.¹¹⁵

Nashar's thinking of art, nature and life as mutually co-extensive are embedded in his aesthetic credo *Tiga Nons (Three Nons)*. Guided by three key principles of 'non-conceptual', 'non-technique', and 'non-aesthetic', it embraces artistic expression in the realm of senses and intuition, unhindered by academic theory and formal technicality.¹¹⁶ In the author's conversation with Handiwirman about the meaning of *Bayangan Bentuk (Allusion of Form)* which prompts reflection on

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ According to Hadler's accounts, Nashar's social biography published in 1976 during Suharto's New Order era is a para-fictional artwork that grapples with the "state's negation of history and repression of direct political discourse." (Hadler 2014, 67).

¹¹⁵ Nashar's *Tiga Nons (Three Nons)* philosophy was mentioned in Katherine's Bruhn's *Landscape Legacies: Visualizing Alam Minangkabau* based on her reading of Nashar's 1976 para-fictional biography *Surat-surat Malam (Night Letters)*. (Bruhn 2018, 48).

¹¹⁶ Gesyada Siregar, "Perupa: Nashar (Artist Nashar)," *Jurnal Seni rupa Warna Jakarta*, Vol. 5 (2017): 5.

the political significance of the everyday, Nashar's ideas were explored. Handiwirman acknowledged that,

Indeed, it is difficult to discuss what was said before 1998, however I am convinced with what Nashar said, you know. Because in the end I was able to distinguish it. For now, I am in a different consciousness, not just a performer anymore, so I can separate the things discussed by Nashar. About what he said about being one but also to give. The object gives him something, but he also gives something to the object. I have not studied Nashar, but after you had made it known to me, I felt I could relate to his thoughts and sayings.¹¹⁷

This discussion with Handiwirman about Nashar's artistic method and aesthetic philosophy has given the author a better grasp of the significance of the everyday by both Jendela and Nashar, a modern art forefather from Minang. Nashar's decisions to create metaphorical works of art amid a time of political change was to obtain a fresh perspective on reality. This was accomplished by embracing the concept of *alam*, whereby artistic interpretations of the human predicament could be manifested in metaphorical abstractions of common objects and subjects. *Alam* alludes 'to be one with nature'. It means having a greater awareness of one's surroundings which shall be discussed in this chapter artworks that probe material and form to discover hidden mechanisms that control life.

To present different iterations of the political in the poetic through the quotidian, this chapter starts with a discussion of Rudi's installation work, *Menjaring*

¹¹⁷ Handiwirman Saputra, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, MPEG-4, 00:44:15-00:45:13. "Memang kalau kita bicarakan susah, tapi dengan proses di awal tadi, yang dikatakan tahun 1998 ke bawah, saya yakin dengan ucapannya Nashar, gitu lho. Karena di situ juga saya juga bisa membedakan akhirnya. Untuk sekarang, saya di dalam kesadaran yang berbeda, bukan pelaku lagi, saya jadi bisa memisahkan hal-hal yang dibicarakan Nashar. Antara dia bilang bagaimana menjadi satu tapi sama-sama saling memberi. Benda memberi ke dia, dia juga ngasih ke bendanya. Nah itu. Saya belum belajar Nashar, tapi setelah dikasi tau, saya langsung merasa, saya sesuai dengan ucapannya."

Keyakinan (Suspension of Belief) whereby the interaction of everyday, industrial materials with elements of nature is a commentary on the invisible forces and complexity of materials that condition human life. Next, this chapter examines Handiwirman's exploration of everyday materials and form as metaphorical commentary on the nature of power and politics in *Patah Hati (Broken Heart)* and *Kiri Baru (The New Left)*.

Rudi Mantofani Menjaring Keyakinan (Suspension of Belief)

In his beginnings as a sculptor, Rudi was already redefining the rules of artistic convention by privileging the everyday over the monumental largely as he felt the latter was detached from the lives of its audience and disconnected from reality. Instead he employed ordinary materials such as sawdust, soil and raw concrete, and this was inspired by his teacher in art college, Anusapati, a prolific sculptor known for his practice using forms and materials from nature. Anusapati's ideas were responses to artefacts unique to the natural and rural worlds of Indonesia; he took inspiration from devices such as agricultural tools, boats, and objects which were loaded with the actual experiences of their users.¹¹⁸ Rudi recounted his early experiences to break away from artistic tradition by emphasising the psychological effects of material,

In Indonesia at that time, whether a sculpture was said to be good or not, one of the criteria was whether it could be enjoyed left to right, top to bottom, displayed in isolation, as if it were separated. I felt that this understanding needed to change. So the beginning of my art practice, as a sculptor I was more inclined at that time to not prioritise monumental forms. I looked for alternative materials that were debated by senior friends at that time. "This is

¹¹⁸ Sumarwahyudi, "Membaca Diikat Karya Anusapati Bersama Roland Barthes (Reading Anusapati with Roland Barthes)," accessed 13 March 2020, <http://sastra.um.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Membaca-â€˜Diikatâ€™-Karya-Anusapati-bersama-Roland-Barthes.pdf>.

not a sculpture” the discussion was there. My works were plastic, sawdust, etc. I tried to share my perspective again with my seniors at that time.¹¹⁹

He elaborated further by saying,

Material is not just a physical or an aesthetic property, but it is an important element of the work. For example, when I use a material like soil, I try to unpack its many meanings such as the notion of land, and various perspectives.¹²⁰

Rudi’s rejection of the formal and material artistic norms, in favour of emphasising ordinary materials and elements of nature, is an aesthetic choice loaded with political resonance. Rudi’s aesthetic concerns are best encapsulated in the work *Menjaring Keyakinan (Suspension of Belief)* (Figure 5) which contemplates the nature of belief in the realm of the political, of how perceptions of control and power are framed and internalised. Rudi’s reflections are embodied in this site-specific installation made up of a large, clear plastic sheet suspended at least three meters high from the gallery wall and cascades down to the floor. The end of the clear plastic sheet is adjoined with a thin layer of stainless steel that curls up on the floor as a subtle way to render visible the invisible work. Over the course of its installation, the translucent but not opaque plastic sheet collects dust, making what was initially crystal clear, into something clouded with dust over the passage of time.¹²¹ Rudi accomplished this by

¹¹⁹ Rudi Mantofani, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 1 December 2019, MPEG-4, 00:37:02-00:38:37.

“Di Indonesia waktu itu, seni patung dikatakan bagus atau tidak, kriterianya salah satu ya itu, bisa dinikmati secara kiri kanan atas bawah, dia di-display secara tersendiri, seperti dipisah. Saya merasa pengertian ini kayaknya sudah perlu diubah deh. Makanya awal-awal kesenian saya, saya kan seni patung, saya lebih cenderung waktu itu memang tidak mengkedepankan bentuk-bentuk monumental. Saya cari material-material alternatif yang menjadi perdebatan bagi teman-teman senior waktu itu. “Ini bukan patung”, diskusinya di situ. Karya-karyanya kan plastik, serbuk gergaji, apa, apa. Saya mencoba berbagi perspektif lagi ke senior-senior saya waktu itu.”

¹²⁰ Rudi Mantofani, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 1 December 2019, MPEG-4, 00:19:34-00:20:32. “Saya tentang psikologis material. Sorry, material bagian dari gagasan. Jadi material bukan sebagai cuma untuk mewujudkan, tetapi merupakan unsur penting dari karya. Misalnya, saya memakai material tanah, dan tanah itu saya coba ambil dari pengertian tanah, berbagai macam perspektif.”

¹²¹ Rudi Mantofani, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 1 December 2019, MPEG-4, 02:49:20-02:49:46.

exercising the concept of *alam* in his artistic choices of common plastic and stainless-steel materials, and the omnipresent natural elements of space and time. In the time-dependent manner in which the invisible plastic apprehends invisible particles of dust, the work brings viewers' attention to the fullness of empty spaces and the latent energy in seemingly ordinary materials. In revealing the perceptible signs of invisible time and space, and complexities of common materials, *Menjaring Keyakinan* is Rudi's way of confronting preconceived notions of what is considered valuable or important by re-evaluating the essence of overlooked objects, unseen spaces, processes and time that are usually ignored and yet define lived experiences in substantial ways. *Menjaring Keyakinan* provides a model for bringing individuals in touch with a physical relationship to the natural world - a relationship, which in Rudi's point of view, had been disrupted.

Having considered Rudi's installation that exemplifies the political resonances of the overlooked and unseen aspects of nature governing everyday life, this chapter shall now examine the next art piece by Handiwirman to discuss the *nature* of politics through allusions of the everyday.

"The work is no longer available. But if I can make it again, I might be able to make it again. I want it, to be exhibited again, maybe the physical can be better. Because the concept is rather fun. Filtering out is capturing the apparent things, not real. Dust is not real, it is not visible, but time will answer."

"Tapi kalau boleh dibuat lagi, saya mungkin bisa bikin lagi. Saya pengen itu, untuk dipamerkan lagi, mungkin fisiknya bisa lebih bagus. Karena konsepnya agak asyik itu. Menjaring itu lho. Menjaring itu kan menangkap hal-hal semu, tidak nyata. Debu itu kan tidak nyata, ngga kelihatan gitu, tapi dengan waktu akan terjawab."

Rudi Mantofani Menjaring Keyakinan (Suspension of Belief)

Figure 5. Rudi Mantofani, “Menjaring Keyakinan (Suspension of Belief),” 2000, Plastic, stainless steel, 300 x 300 cm. In *Jendela: Membuka Kemungkinan (Jendela: Opening Possibilities)*, page 22, Yogyakarta: Purna Budaya and Jakarta: Galarie Cipta II TIM, 2000. Image courtesy of Gajah Gallery Singapore.

Handiwirman Saputra *Patah Hati (Broken Heart)*

Figure 6. Handiwirman Saputra, “Patah Hati (Broken Heart),” 2001, Wood, thread, copper, dimensions variable. In *Jendela: Estaticus Mundi*, page 12, Bandung: Selesar Sunaryo, 2002. Image courtesy of Gajah Gallery Singapore.

The notion of imperceptible traces of energy inherent in nondescript spaces and objects continues to develop in the installation *Patah Hati (Broken Heart)* (Figure 6) by Handiwirman as an example of how unseen forces, in this case gravity, can take down the big and powerful. Handiwirman described the dynamic installation, wherein the meaning of the political in the poetic are both created and reflected upon in the nature of the space, form and materials of the work as,

The one at Cemeti was *Broken Heart*, but it was laughed at here. The title is really tacky, what is this (laughs) But this work was not really exposed, which was unfortunate, as it was actually good. Almost all the works in this show were objects. I also don’t keep them anymore. So – as I told you earlier, the conditions were indeed like this – very big on top, and it was indeed good,

you know. But it is only had these little legs to support it. So people were really afraid, until I am told to add these (strings) – actually without them, it could stand up on its own.¹²²

He went on to explain,

On the opposite side, there was a decorated knife - the blade was sewn again, weaved. There are holes and threads too. But the tips of the blades are still sharp. So there is a contrast between beautiful – everything that is hung is beautiful, there is ornament, there are flowers. But yes, there are risks too. There is danger too (laughs) I have to love this, because I'm afraid (to fall).¹²³

It could be suggested the work was a metaphor on the fragile nature of political power that despite its sheer size and strength, is still conditioned in a delicate balance within everyday forces beyond its control. Handiwirman achieved this by introducing contrasting hard and delicate elements into the installation. It presents a rectangular wooden box supported on four slender, knobbly legs made out of copper. The legs end in needle points that meet the floor, however its acute angularity and delicate thin legs struggle to support the weight and torque of the elongated box on top. The entire piece stops short of crashing to the floor because it was held afloat by the tension of a steel cable attached at the top of the work and anchored to the gallery walls. In this frail balance, the work wobbles back and forth

¹²² Handiwirman Saputra, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, 00:51:13-00:52:03.

“Yang di Cemeti itu *Patah Hati*, tapi diketawain si ini. Judulnya kok norak, ini apa (laughs) Tapi agak ini sih, ngga ke-ekspos banget, sayang juga, sebetulnya bagus-bagus. Hampir semuanya objek. Semua karya itu objek. Saya juga ngga nyimpan lagi. Jadi memang semuanya itu – seperti yang tadi saya cerita. Kondisinya itu memang kayak gini – gede sekali di atas, dan memang bagus, gitu lho. Tapi memang yang untuk nahan ini cuma kaki kecil.gini. Jadi orang pun takut sebetulnya, sampai saya disuruh kasih ini – sebetulnya tanpa inipun dia berdiri.”

¹²³ Handiwirman Saputra, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, 00:54:00-00:55:01.

Di bagian sebaliknya, ada pisau yang dihias – mata pisau dijahit lagi, dianyam. Ada lubang dan ada benang-benang juga. Tapi runcingnya masih runcing. Jadi ada kontras antara cantik – semuanya yang digantung semuanya cantik, ada ornament, ada bunga-bunga. Tapi ya gitu, ada resikonya juga. Ada bahayanya juga (laughs) Saya harus kasih ini, karena takut (jatuh).”

rattling lines of coiled assemblages nailed into the wooden block. Each palm-sized assemblage was made up of threads gathered into a teardrop shape. Nestled within each cluster of threads, is a hooked blade with its sharp edge pointing down. Dainty and yet dangerous, the rows of blades hung precariously and risked falling and causing injury to viewers if agitated.

According to Handiwirman, the title of the work *Patah Hati (Broken Heart)* was thought to be a piece about a broken-hearted affair, however he insists it was about his ‘broken heart’ caused by the fine arts. Agung echoed Handiwirman’s sentiments in the exhibition catalogue he wrote for *Ecstasius Mundi* in 2002 describing *Patah Hati (Broken Heart)* as a “deep cynical mock towards the concept of beauty. It is a cynical perspective on art which at the same time expressed with extremely deep love.”¹²⁴ Just like Rudi, Handiwirman was rebelling against the conventions of making and presenting art by emphasising everyday forms and materials. Nindityo Adipurnomo founder of Cemeti Art Space, where the work was exhibited in 2001, described the work as aptly deconstructing traditional ideas about craft by focusing instead on social perception of objects and materials.¹²⁵ Furthermore, in recognising the limits of the visibility, both site-specific installations by Rudi and Handiwirman consider other invisible forces that shape everyday experience. From this expanded point of view, both artists bring our attention to environmental energies surrounding their works that contribute meaning to form, and simultaneously one can begin to understand, and even undermine, man-made “invisible” political systems like government and class. By doing this through the form of the work rather than its explicit content, both artists model the notion of an artist using “form as social

¹²⁴ Agung Hujatnikajennong, “Wancana Benci dan Rindu (A Discourse of Love and Hate)” in *Ecstasius Mundi* (Bandung: Selesar Sunaryo and Jakarta: Air Art House, 2002), 4.

¹²⁵ Nindityo Adipurnomo, introduction to *Things: The Order of Handiwirman* (Yogyakarta: Cemeti Art House, 2009), 1. The artwork was first shown in Handiwirman’s solo exhibition Cemeti Art Space, Yogyakarta in 2001 and Jendela’s group show. The installation of this artwork in what is considered to be critical art spaces for contemporary art in Indonesia was an early indication of how the artist’s practice was perceived.

commitment” which, in Rudi’s account was about rethinking the reconstitution of form and its meaning. Rudi and Handiwirman’s site-specific installations interrogated materiality and responded to the conditions and parameters of space, challenging the limits of perception in the everyday through phenomenological experience. The next section discusses a work by Handiwirman that presents another approach of making poetic enquiries into ordinary objects that can engender novel perspectives on the political, by exploring the nature of perception through a compositional experiment with everyday forms.

Handiwirman Saputra *Kiri Baru (The New Left)*

Figure 7. Handiwirman Saputra, “Kiri Baru (The New Left),” 1999, Mixed media on canvas, 130 x 150 cm. In *Handiwirman Saputra: Saat Bentuk Menjadi Kelakuan (The Moment when Form becomes Action)*, page 65, Tokyo: Nadi Gallery, 2015. Image courtesy of Gajah Gallery Singapore.

Kiri Baru, which means *The New Left* (Figure 7), is Handiwirman’s unique view on the politics of perception inspired by the heightened political tensions during the time of its production. To illustrate his idea that the formation of perceptions such as political positions are not absolute, but rather relative and contingent on vantage points, Handiwirman explored these perceptual possibilities through the arrangement of everyday objects,

Well yeah, I became sceptical, you know. At that time, after '98, I see ... all of them (the artworld) were mocking, their works were mocking. So this artwork *Kiri Baru (The New Left)*, is something I repeat often. So that’s actually the table

in the middle, if I put a mirror, it becomes the right. So, I don't know which left, which right. Like in politics, there is left and there is right. In my mind, neither of them exists. The one there is negotiating, is in the middle, so.¹²⁶

According to the artist, what is in immediate view is a mirror set upon a table. On the furthest side of the table (from the viewer's perspective), an arm extends out of a door frame with a finger pointing upwards. This arm, protruding out of the door as an anatomically unrealistic appendage, further heightens the mystery of this work by its partially concealed nature. The mirror on the table retains the reflection of the raised arm but is not in view because the mirror's back is facing the viewer. Here, the mirror becomes the fulcrum of this composition and the focal point of Handiwirman's conceptual reasoning that what is considered right or left, such as the raised arm in question or in politics, depends on the vantage point. For instance, if the figure behind the door is facing the viewer, technically it is raising its left arm, however if the figure has its back to the viewer, it is actually raising its right arm. Such elements of *Kiri Baru* (*The New Left*) are recognisable in Umberto Eco's rumination of the mirror paradox by inviting the viewer to think of the mirror as a 'prosthetic eye', a third eye situated in our index finger. By pointing at oneself, this third eye functions the same way as a mirror 'seeing' and 'giving' a view, which explains why the first mirrors, were hand mirrors, extensions of one's arm.¹²⁷ It is this mode of reflection and introspection that drives home Handiwirman's point on the political nature of power based on viewpoints and concealment. What is

¹²⁶ Handiwirman Saputra, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, MPEG-4, 00:29:49-00:31:12.

"Ya itu, aku jadi ngga punya apa ... jadi skeptis gitu lho. Waktu itu ya, setelah '98, ya gitu... semuanya banyak mencibir sih, karyanya mencibir. Terus, yang *Kiri Baru* tadi itu. Sampai sekarang sering aku ulang. Jadi itu sebetulnya meja di tengah, kalau aku taruh cermin, ini sebelah kanan. Jadi ngga tau kiri mana, kanan mana. Kayak di politik, ada kiri dan ada kanan. Dalam pikiranku, keduanya itu ngga ada. Yang ada runding, di tengah, gitu. Jadi itulah yang aku tawarin lagi di Venice Biennale, untuk pavilion, "Akar tak sekali datang, Runding tak sekali tiba". Itu cara berpikirku. Mulai dari sini, aku mulai bukan lagi untuk menghasilkan ini, kerjaan saja, tapi untuk menyampaikan pikiran."

¹²⁷ Umberto Eco, "Kant and the Platypus: Essays on Language and Cognition," *New York: Harcourt Brace and Company*, (1999): 464. Accessed 20 April 2020, <http://www2.phil.cam.ac.uk/~swb24/reviews/Eco.htm>.

considered left or right depends on the vantage point of the viewer, and whether that view is indeed an actual depiction of reality or a mirror view.

Daily life might often be perceived as banal and apolitical; however the discussion of works in this chapter have shown how Jendela's poetic enquiries on everyday forms and ordinary materials reveals the political dimensions of paying attention to how the "details of daily life can reveal an insight into the broader system."¹²⁸

Developing this idea further is Alexandra Kogl's elucidation that everyday life is political as it is shaped by collective normative judgements on daily routines and activities revolving around "human-made conditions of laws, markets, spaces and norms."¹²⁹ Therefore, the next chapter shall further explore this "human-made context" that is sometimes rendered invisible in daily form and material in another equally ubiquitous entity, that of the body.

¹²⁸ Niko Papastergiadis, *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place, and the Everyday* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2010), 24.

¹²⁹ Alexandra Kogl, "A Hundred Ways of Beginning: The Politics of Everyday Life" *Polity* 41, no. 4 (2009): 514-35. Accessed 29 November 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40587509>.

CHAPTER 5

Jiwa Ketok (Visible Soul)

The previous chapters, *Coretan (Transient Lines)* and *Bayangan Bentuk (Allusion of Form)*, had considered two distinct vocabularies of Jendela (lines, material and form) that carry political resonances of identity and the everyday. These considerations continue in this chapter *Jiwa Ketok (Visible Soul)* which focus on Jendela's depictions of the body as visions of displacement, alienation, isolation and marginalisation. These portrayals of the body were not only representations of actual persons or characters, but also symbolic of the political dimensions of displacement, disorientation and disillusionment. These leitmotifs are reflected in solitary depictions of the human figure and portraits, or with dispossessed groups of people sometimes set against barren landscapes, which carry a mood of melancholy and longing. Such unsettling and provocative imagery is achieved through the process of *coretan*, rendering emotionally charged imagery and distortion of subjects, in volatile sweeps of paint and subtle disjunctions between form and colour.

Considering the recurrence of political resonances of identity and the everyday in these works, this chapter turns to recollections of the artists who discussed the facets of their Minang identities to explore psychoanalytical anxieties through depictions of the body. In chapter two, Jumaldi spoke at length about the historical baggage he and members of the Jendela carried, which prevented them from getting involved in political activity, or making any direct political commentary in their art. This was due to an episode in Indonesia political history in 1961, known as the PRRI-Permesta Rebellion, that struck West Sumatra, where innocent lives were lost in the political crossfire.¹³⁰ Similarly, Handiwirman spoke of the political

¹³⁰ Such feelings of unease of one's place in matters related to the political were echoed in the recollections by the artists through my interviews conducted with them in 2019 when I posed the question if Asikin Hasin's deduction in his newspaper review of Jendela's exhibition in 2002 that Jendela's detachment from political matters might be due "the political traumas of the PRRI-Permesta Rebellion that once struck West Sumatra and the influence of Communism in social realism art that make political activism a difficult endeavour in the hometowns of Jendela." In chapter two, Jumaldi recalls his father forbidding him to mention or be involved in any way regarded with politics,

implications of the Minangkabau identity by citing the importance of names for two different generations,

Consciously or not, but indeed my parents when I was a child always advised me not to follow this, it's other people's business. Because parents certainly experienced it. Like the names, we also changed our names after that. My father's name, Hamdani Hamid and mother, Nor. My parents' names are Malay, close to Malay names. After that, it was indeed difficult, I don't know whether or not it was true, but according to the story, especially for the people of West Sumatra to use the name, so a little - to go to the centre, you know. I don't know if it is related but there is indeed a tendency for parents not to give their children's names again that resonate with Sumatra.¹³¹

It could be argued Jendela who had experiences of identity entanglements with the political, and as newly arrived migrants from Sumatra in Yogyakarta, had a subconscious, acute awareness of identity issues during a time of nationwide civil unrest. The process of political reformation exposed deep-seated racial tensions, dormant for decades, where certain minority groups such as the Indonesian Chinese became “scapegoats for poverty and people's suffering.”¹³² It is this sense of

recalling armed conflict between the central government and PRRI rebels in 1961 that claimed 35,000 innocent lives in Sumatra who were caught in the political crossfire.

¹³¹ Handiirman Saputra, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, MPEG-4, 01:50:11-01:52:00. “Secara sadar ngga, tapi memang orang tua dulu sewaktu saya kecil selalu berpesan untuk ngga usah mengikutin ini lah, urusan orang. Karena orang tua kan pasti mengalami itu. Kayak nama, kita pun berubah nama setelah itu juga. Ngga, kayak dulu bapak saya namanya Hamid, Hamdani Hamid. Kalo ibu, Nor. Keluarga itu namanya Melayu, deket lah dengan nama-nama Melayu. Setelah itu, kan memang sulit ya, saya ngga tau bener atau ngga, tapi menurut cerita, terutama untuk orang Sumatra Barat untuk menggunakan nama itu, jadi sedikit – untuk ke pusat, gitu lho. Karena terasa sekali itu nama. Jadi ini berhubungan atau ngga, mungkin ditanya aja ke ini kali ya. Tapi memang ada kecenderungan orang tua untuk ngga ngasih nama anaknya lagi dengan nama-nama berbau Sumatra.”

¹³² Siaw T'iong Djin, “Looking back to May 1998, 20 years forward”, *Jakarta Post*, accessed 19 December 2020, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2018/05/25/looking-back-to-may-1998-20-years-forward.html>.

In Chris Manning and Peter Van Dierman. “Indonesia in Transition: Social Dimensions of Reformasi and Crisis,” the process of political reform led to nationwide civil unrest as “social tensions that lain dormant for decades intensified. Conflicts broke out between ethnic and religious groups, between migrants and local populations, and between dispossessed people and workers on the one hand, and land owners and capitalists on the other.” The experience of

displacement and paranoia that would have intensified the group's observations and renditions of the human condition, during this time of great duress.¹³³

Jendela's search for artistic truth through the articulations of the body is reflected in S.Sudjojono's concept of *Jiwa Ketok*, that literally translates as *visible soul*.¹³⁴ The term was adopted for this chapter's discussion on human experience in politically charged times as "human spirit which is manifested onto canvas making itself visible". This idea was devised by Sudjojono, who stressed themes of everyday life, and saw "the painter as a self-determining social agent whose complete artistic autonomy or freedom (*kebebasan*) was necessary in order to serve as a tool for the expression of truth: painting should be free from any one group of moralisers and political parties."¹³⁵ There are similarities between Sudjojono's *Jiwa Ketok* and the overarching argument of Jendela's artistic autonomy of emphasising the inner world of individual experiences and allusions of the everyday over the outer world of social commentary and revolutionary polemics. The concept of embracing the spirit of *rasa* in *Jiwa Ketok* as an expression for artistic truth was echoed by Jumaldi, who said,

violence and trauma was especially pronounced for minority groups such as Indonesian Chinese who were targets when riots broke out due to economic problems such as food shortages and mass unemployment.

¹³³ Mandatory male out migration is one of the key tenets of Minangkabau tradition known as *merantau*, where adult males in this society must travel afar for self-actualisation.

¹³⁴ Regarded as a pioneering figure of Modern Indonesian Art, Sudjojono famous axiom emerged at a time of great stress, when Indonesia was seeking independence from its Dutch rulers. He was a staunch critic of the Mooi indie painting genre and rallied Indonesian painters to paint the real conditions of his country with their own characteristics and identity because works of art should be *jiwa ketok* or visible souls of the artists who created them.

According to Amir Sidharta's *S.Sudjojono: The Artist, Realiteit and Truth*, "In 1938, in the period of Indonesian nationalist movement, Sudjojono wanted to depict the reality of the social life of the suffering and colonised people. He stressed themes of everyday life, but at that time was not using visual language couched in realistic techniques depicting objects as they were. In fact he advocated an emphasis on character through strong brushstrokes to honestly reveal *jiwa ketok*-the visible expression of the spirit or soul." (Sidharta 2008, 42).

¹³⁵ Amanda Rath, "Contextualizing Contemporary Art: Propositions of Critical Artistic Practice in Seni Rupa Kontemporer in Indonesia," (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2011), 117.

If we look at the definition of *Jiwa Ketok* as Sudjojono's definition of brush strokes, about what you feel; it's more about the *rasa*. Other than *rasa*, it is about attitude and concept. *Jiwa Ketok* attitude is not just about brushstrokes, but about your attitude, your concept. So for example, it's about nationalism, there are painters whose brushstrokes are common, but nationalism is to show that you are an Indonesian, that's politics, actually. But *Jiwa Ketok* is about *rasa* when you make work. So what you feel, and what you have at that time, technique, simplicity and abilities, that's what you have. I couldn't be any more sophisticated than that, because that is my ability.¹³⁶

Considering Jendela's articulations of the body as metaphors of the political discerned through the ideas of *Jiwa Ketok*, this chapter examines a selection of works that present the elements of *coretan* as revelations of the artists' lived experiences during the tumults of Reformasi. It begins with a discussion of Jumaldi's *Pencari Ketenangan* (*Peace Seeker*) whose inner struggles and penetrating self-analysis displayed through the body are symbolic of the interactions of political, social and cultural factors. This chapter also considers the portraits *Duduk/Berdiri* (*Sit/Stand*) and *Dua Tangan* (*Two Hands*) by Handiwirman, whose distorted and fragmented bodies are metaphors for the human condition manipulated by socio-political subjectivities. These artworks, revealed through the style of *coretan*, focus on anatomical articulations as politically charged gestures.

¹³⁶ Jumaldi Alfi, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, MPEG-4, 00:08:52-00:09:50.

"Kalau kita lihat definisinya Jiwa Ketok sebagai definisinya Sudjojono tentang *brush strokes*, tentang apa yang kamu rasakan; itu lebih ke arah *rasa* nya. Kan Jiwa Ketoknya Sudjojono bisa kita tarik selain dari pada *rasa*, adalah sikap. Sikap Jiwa Ketok kan bukan sekedar brush stroke, tapi sikap kamu, konsep kamu. Jadi misalnya tentang nasionalisme, ada pelukis-pelukis yang kadang-kadang brush stroke nya biasa, tetapi nasionalisme itu untuk menunjukkan bahwa kamu orang Indonesia, itu kan politik, sebenarnya. Tapi kalau Jiwa Ketok yang ini adalah tentang *rasa* saat menuangkan karya. Jadi, apa yang memang kamu *rasa*, dan apa yang kamu miliki saat itu – teknik, sederhananya dan kemampuanmu, itu yang kamu miliki. Saya tidak bisa lebih canggih daripada itu, karena itu kemampuan saya."

Jumaldi Alfi *Pencari Ketenangan (Peace Seeker)*

Jumaldi's *Pencari Ketenangan (Peace Seeker)* (Figure 8) is a series of self-portraits in which the artist's experience is conditioned by social, historical and political factors imprinted into depictions of emaciated, solitary figures. With a significant emphasis on the body the work is emblematic of the adage "the personal is political" which O'Reilly argues "encapsulates the potential for an individual to represent wider issues such a cultural difference, historical context, racial differentiation."¹³⁷ *Pencari Ketenangan (Peace Seeker)* was completed in 2003, five years after Reformasi, and stands out as a personal statement about the truths of the time one lives in. Jumaldi spoke about the work as an expression of the immense pressure and depression he was shouldering as an artist and family breadwinner during a time of great political and economic uncertainty,

At that time, we did not know many things about the current situation, whether or not rupiah will rise, or will there be a disaster. It was a time of deep personal reflection. I was newly married, then had two kids so I feel the responsibility as a father. However, as an artist I did feel not successful, I was torn between making a living for my family and focusing on my spiritual life. So it was very chaotic, internally.¹³⁸

Jumaldi's struggles, intensified by this politically difficult period, can be felt through his depictions of the body in this triptych of paintings. Distorted and disfigured, they create the impression of persons in the throes of mental and physical

¹³⁷ Sally O'Reilly, *The Body in Contemporary Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2018), 79.

¹³⁸ Jumaldi Alfi, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, MPEG-4, 00:28:37-00:29:24. "Waktu itu, kita tidak – kita tidak tahu ada kejadian apa tahun segitu, entah ada Rupiah mau naik, ada bencana apa – ngga ngerti, karena waktu itu kita memang refleksi pribadi. Dan ini masa-masa ketika saya baru berumah tangga. Saya punya anak dua malah ini, jadi saya merasa sebagai tanggung jawab. Bapak, tapi sebagai seniman saya merasa belum berhasil, itu bikin saya menjadi – (di) satu (sisi), saya harus menghidupi keluarga, (di) satu (sisi) saya harus menghidupi rohani saya yang belum kuat, gitu kan. Jadi kacau, ya kan?"

anguish. In the first canvas, a body is set on fire, balancing a heavy boulder on its back while balancing precariously on cacti. This figurative depiction alludes to the tragic character in Greek mythology, Sisyphus, who was cursed by the gods to push a huge rock up a hill, only to watch it roll down the other side, and repeat this action, again and again. According to Berghuis, the stone is testimony of the artist's self-reflection and invokes the philosophy in Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), which suggests the absurdity of seeking meaning in a universe devoid of any.¹³⁹ This sense of disillusionment with the times is carried through in the rest of the paintings where depictions of the body are represented as evanescent figures, on the verge of disappearance. These figurative renditions in smudged contours and blurred outlines could be argued to be representations of temporality and transformation. For they are testimonies of the volatile political era that Jumaldi lived through, which was as turbulent as his early, nomadic years due to his family's financial situation. As a young child, Jumaldi experienced the effects of displacement which he recounted in his self-published autobiography *Alfi* and later in interviews with the author.¹⁴⁰

These incidents remained vivid in his psyche and became the genesis of his poetic sensibilities. Jumaldi's story with art and poetry started when he relocated from his homeland West Sumatra to West Java with his parents who were in search of work. Having spent most of his childhood alone without the company of siblings, he preferred the company of books. Such early influences could be seen when he emulated the powerful strokes and colour gradation techniques in comics by Jair and Teguh Santosa. Jumaldi's preoccupation with the rhetorical began in his adolescent

¹³⁹ Thomas Berghuis, *Jumaldi Alfi: The Art of Looking* (Yogyakarta: OFCA International, 2008), 16. According to Berghuis, the stone is testimony to the self-reflection of the artist and invokes the philosophy of the 'absurd' in Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), which describes man's futile search for meaning.

¹⁴⁰ Jumaldi Alfi, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, MPEG-4, 00:59:17-01:00:04. "I have nine siblings, and I am the last child, and a poor person, and in school I am not the one who was the center of attention. Then migrated to Java, had to live alone, from my teens, had to experience illness, I was happy alone. There are no brothers in Jogja, I am alone. So after finishing junior high school, I went to Jogja as a foreigner. At that time I was 16 years of age."

years in two ways. Firstly, Jumaldi was steeped in the power of words through the spiritual training Minang males receive at the village *surau* (prayer house), which include learning the Qur'an and the *Naqsyabandiyah tarekat* – a mystical Islamic practice that evokes the power of words in silent invocations known as *dhikr*.¹⁴¹ Secondly, Jumaldi was exposed to rhetoric through poets Sofyan and Itji Tarmizi, who were friends of the family and ex-members of Sanggar *Bumi Tarung* (*Fighting Earth Studio*) related to the LEKRA (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat), a prolific literary, artistic and social movement associated with Partai Komunis Indonesia (Indonesian Communist Party). These factors ignited his interest to pursue arts and painting when he relocated to Yogyakarta to complete high school at *Sekolah Mengenal Seni Rupa* (School for the Visual Arts), and at college, where he first met members of Jendela.¹⁴² Jumaldi's lifelong nomadic state preoccupies his thoughts on identity and belonging, and he discusses how it underscores the composition of *Pencari Ketenangan* (*Peace Seeker*),

I feel emotional at the time. That is to say, this is psychological, how my fields are divided, it was stable - this was about stability. You see, how my hope at that time was a flat, calm, balanced world. But my condition was not balanced, so there was fire, scratches, chaos, fatigue, that's right. What is revealed to me most strongly is the element of ambiguity, paradox. The paradox of what constitutes a Minang person and Javanese person- so, it's messy for me, right? Minang people are paradoxical.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Naqshbandi, Encyclopedia.com, accessed December 19 2020, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/naqshbandi>

¹⁴² Jumaldi Alfi, *Alfi* (Yogyakarta: 2008), 13.

¹⁴³ Jumaldi Alfi, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, MPEG-4, 00:35:38-00:36:37.

“Memang saya merasa saat itu emosional. Maksudnya memang, ini kejiwaan, bagaimana bidang-bidang saya bagi, ada stabil – ini kan tentang kestabilan. Kamu lihat, bagaimana harapan saya waktu itu adalah dunia yang flat, tenang, seimbang. Tapi kondisi saya tidak seimbang, jadi ada api, goresan, kekacauan, kelelahan, gitu kan. Dan saat itu yang paling menjadi sorotannya, rata-rata tapi di saya itu paling kuat, adalah tentang ambiguitas, paradoks. Kalau di saya, kerasa sekali, paradoks nya itu. Paradoks sebagai orang Minang dan orang Jawa yang memang – saya kacau di situ, gitu kan? Orang Minang sendiri sudah paradoks.”

Figure 8.1. Jumaldi Alfi, “Pencari Ketenangan (Peace Seeker),” 2003, Oil on canvas, 70 x 70 cm each, Triptych. In *Alfi*, page 58-60, Yogyakarta: 2008. Image courtesy of author.

Figure 8.2 and 8.3. Jumaldi Alfi, “Pencari Ketenangan (Peace Seeker),” 2003, Oil on canvas, 70 x 70 cm each, Triptych. In *Alfi*, page 58-60, Yogyakarta: 2008. Image courtesy of author.

Therefore, it could be argued that Jumaldi's physiological experiences have political dimensions of identity and cultural legacies which emerge as existential views of an unpredictable future, post-Reformasi. Jumaldi projected his vision by juxtaposing representations of the body with poetic elements of *coretan* and *alam*. The textual characteristics of *coretan* pervasive in Jendela's oeuvre, appear here as forms of introspection. The words *duka mu abadi*, which means *your pain is eternal sorrow*, appear twice in the foreground of the first canvas. These words are from the title of a book of poems written in 1969 by Sapardi Djoko Damono, a pioneer of lyrical poetry in Indonesia. This collection of existential poems by Sapardi parallels Jendela's poetic approach as artists facing the socio-political realities of their time. Sapardi's poems focused more on the human condition rather than revolutionary and social ideas that preoccupied his contemporaries, and the same is true for Jendela. The disjointed, truncated words; 'LIBERTE', 'I never KNOW who', 'DO it FOOL I CAN STA' that recur throughout the paintings suggest feelings of personal longing, doubt, and resignation which mirrored the uncertainty of times the work was produced in. Additionally, Jumaldi's portrayal of the tropes of *alam* (nature) emphasised his existential views of one's place in a world of flux. The feelings of isolation and alienation are heightened in the depiction of barren landscapes in which his figures were set. In the background of the first canvas are a pair of translucent mountains that allude to the metaphorical significance of mountains in modern Indonesian art as a symbol of power.¹⁴⁴ However, unlike the stoic mounds of his artistic predecessors, the ethereal appearance of Jumaldi's mountains, floating and on the brink of dissolution, further emphasise the unsettling theme of this work. The recurring depiction of cacti, a symbol of survival, in the first and second canvas is common in Jendela's body of work.¹⁴⁵ Presented here with Jendela's struggling

¹⁴⁴ Astri Wright, *Soul, Spirit and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), 150.

¹⁴⁵ Enin Supriyanto, "Alfi: In Layers and in prints" in *Jumaldi Alfi Melting Memories*, (Singapore: Singapore Tyler Print Institute, 2011), 16.

ethereal figures, it is a mark of quiet resistance against the larger oppressive forces of the world and thus one which bears political resonance. Just like *Myth of Sisyphus*, liberation is possible by embracing absurdity and resisting the false control of the gods.

Having considered Jumaldi's representation of the body as metaphors of the political, the next discussion focuses on Handiwirman's presentation of the body, specifically on how he presents anatomical articulations as politically charged gestures.

Handiwirman Saputra *Duduk/Berdiri (Sit/Stand) and Dua Tangan (Two Hands)*

These paintings by Handiwirman present a study of the body as an instrument for experiencing and expressing psychological and physiological tension through aesthetic shifts between abstract and figurative modes. This analysis of the artist's formal exploration of the body through distortion and fragmentation is an articulation of the human condition manipulated by socio-political subjectivities. These are revealed through the style of *coretan* and focus on anatomical articulations as politically charged gestures. *Duduk/Berdiri* (Figure 9), which literally translates as *Sit/Stand* (Figure 10), deals with the unconscious yet essential bodily actions performed daily, actualised in a series of figures. Upon closer inspection, the bodies are not in a state of ease, and show signs of tension and pain. The figure at the fore is standing on its left leg, leaning forward with hands crossed holding the right leg by the foot. Two narrow twigs stick out of the sole of the right foot, possibly pricked by thorns as suggested by the hand-written word "DURi" on his left, which is the Indonesian word for 'thorn'. Behind the standing figure is a seated figure in a cross-legged position. Its torso seems unusually large when compared to the contorted lower half of the body. Both arms extend downwards from the shoulders and lead our eyes to blackened hands with palms facing downwards. Though the facial features of both figures are obscured, the seated figure has its tongue sticking out. This silent act of provocation is intensified by the speechless stance of the standing figure as seen by the speech bubble hand drawn at the right side of its head which is empty, devoid of words or expression. Similar to the aforementioned work, *Dua Tangan* translated as *Two Hands*, is another example by Handiwirman in this contextual study on the human condition. The focal point of this composition is the figure, standing with legs apart and arms raised in surrender. In open palms facing the viewer, Handiwirman doodled in a comical facial retort in the manner of a tongue sticking out of each hand, similar to the gesture in *Duduk/Diri*. When the author enquired on this recurring motif, Handiwirman explained,

This is funny too. It's oil paint, but I mix it with water. But here, there was an attempt to express – this artwork *Dua Tangan, Two Hands* looks like a person sticking out their tongue, mocking, snickering. That's what I thought, so it's different from this work. There is something I want to convey but not really.¹⁴⁶

He elaborated by saying,

Although there is an emotional intensity in these works, I wanted to make a point by also injecting humour. The whole act of sticking out a tongue, is way of snickering and mocking. In the face of power, I surrender, but at the same time I am sneering (laughs), it is like getting hit but I am sticking out my tongue. It's all about an individual attitude. Same with nationalism. It is easy actually in my mind, to transcend power. Just give it all, later they will confuse themselves, and it will not be of any use. (laughs). That is my thinking.¹⁴⁷

In such gestures of contempt, and subtle acts of defiance, there is a recognition and self-awareness on Handiwirman's part on the social realities of the time when these artworks were made. This thesis opines in such times of social and political strife, Handiwirman's reflections about individual liberty are in this instance contested through his representations of the body. Handiwirman's handling of the figurative can be discerned through O'Reilly's thoughts which suggest the "reciprocal influence between individual and context runs counter to the traditional

¹⁴⁶ Handiwirman Saputra, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, MPEG-4, 00:29:07-00:29:46.

"Lucu juga sih. Ini cat minyak, tapi saya campurnya dengan air. Tapi ini ada usaha untuk mengungkapkan ini – ini (*Dua Tangan*, 1999) kan kayak orang melet, mencibir. Aku pikirnya seperti itu, jadi beda dengan karya yang ini. Ada sesuatu yang ingin aku sampaikan. Tapi ngga terlalu."

¹⁴⁷ Handiwirman Saputra, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, MPEG-4, 01:06:20-01:07:09.

"Jadi saya menggunakan metafor tentang kekuasaan, karena biasanya yang berkuasa kan yang punya senjata. Tapi balik lagi ke yang tadi saya katakan, saya ngalah, tapi sama mencibir (laughs) Kayak dipukulin ngga apa-apa, tapi masih bisa melet gitu ya. Ya seperti itu. Jadi ada sikap sendiri, sebetulnya. Saya melihat kebangsaan juga seperti itu. Sebetulnya mudah, dalam pikiran saya, untuk menghancurkan kekuasaan. Kasih aja semua, nanti dia bingung sendiri, ngga berguna juga (laughs). Itu dalam pikiran saya."

role of portraiture, which proposed to establish the identity, reveal the temperament and delineate the character of the individual...whereas contemporary artists are generally more interested in the body as the point at which art and life converge.” In summary, “depictions of the body are no longer fixated on ideas of sovereign identity, and one’s sense of the world is formed in relation to the world, to immediate circumstances as well as to history and socio-political ebbs and flow.”¹⁴⁸ This is evident in the Handiurman figures, where their crudely defined bodies devoid of any material possession and obscured facial features eradicate any clear signifiers of class, gender or identity. Despite these faceless, ambiguous forms, there is a sensation of strong emotional energy that emphasises the artist’s reflections on the human condition. Though the identity of Handiurman’s figures may not be easily discernible, the essence of wrought emotion and desolation as a manifestation of its times is palpable in its raw, tenuous imagery. Handiurman’s sensorial-led explorations with figuration echoes Sudjojono’s philosophy of *Jiwa Ketok*, by which the visible expression of the soul is not in reproducing reality through realistic artistic techniques, but in reconnecting artistic expression with the realm of the senses.

¹⁴⁸ Sally O’Reilly, *The Body in Contemporary Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2018), 33.

Handiwirman achieves this by drawing the viewer to the visceral, abstract rendition of the body laden with the semantic weight of flesh and blood. Here we see the artist's rapid and intuitive linework in the style of *coretan* that deconstructs and reconstructs the bodily forms, simultaneously holding our focus on the textured surface of the canvas, and at the same time triggering cognition and tactile faculties in deciphering the subject-object beforehand. As these sensorial elements are a psychological trigger, the emphasis on blood - through the tones in painting washes and thicker detailing - give the work an undertow of violence or violation. A sense of violation is further heightened in what seems to be an encasement or entrapment of these figures. The suggestion of these bodies in unspecified spaces is attributed by the black, angular line markings running through both picture planes. Such lines run at a 45 degree angle against the standing figure in *Duduk/Berdiri*, and are superimposed as a large cross on both artworks. There is a suggestion of a room of an unspecified space, or the illusion of a body in cage-like containment. By encasing his figures, Handiwirman reflects the viewers' act of looking back to them, inversely making the viewers aware of their own act of surveillance. In conditioning the viewer through this transgressive act, Handiwirman brings to the fore matters of power-play, where the political proclamation for self and individuality are embodied in the cheeky sneer of his embattled bodies.

Jendela's representations of the body emulating poetic concepts of *rasa* and *jiva ketok* had revealed political resonances of "societal pressures, expectations and needs; but taking command of one's own image can also be a strategy of protest and survival."¹⁴⁹ Where this chapter's debate on the body in words of O'Reilly "marks the points of contact between extensive socio-political, historical, and cultural networks with which it interacts, so that its freedoms, opportunities and constraints

¹⁴⁹ Sally O'Reilly, *The Body in Contemporary Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2018), 77.

become an essential subject for analysis.”¹⁵⁰ Similarly, so were the examples of artworks which had been discussed in the preceding chapters, and shall be surmised in the next concluding chapter.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 99.

Figure 10. Handiurman Saputra, "Dua Tangan (Two Hands)," 1999, Mixed media on canvas, 150 x 130 cm. In *Jendela: From a Window*, page 9, Bali: Hotel Padma, 1999. Image courtesy of Gajah Gallery Singapore.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine how the political and the poetic intertwine in the early works of Jendela and illuminate a new critical understanding of the collective's practice and place in contemporary Indonesian art. This study explored how this framework – the political in the poetic – brings to light a different perspective on Jendela early artworks and practice in the Reformasi era, through carrying out specific investigations on their artworks in the earlier thematic chapters of *Coretan (Transient Lines)*, *Bayangan Bentuk (Allusion of Form)*, and *Jiwa Ketok (Visible Soul)*. The conceptual and contextual discussions on the interpretive framework, and especially in close readings and analysis of specific works, were informed and enabled by my interviews with the artists. What is presented in this thesis is therefore an interdisciplinary approach in the appraisal of art that considers the complex constellation of society, politics, history, biography and culture.

This study began on the premise that Jendela, unlike many of their artistic contemporaries, did not make overtly political works and were criticised accordingly. Although Jendela's early works portrayed everyday banal subjects and objects, this thesis suggests there *is* a political sensibility in the formally restrained yet emotionally charged works, which is yet to be fully appreciated. This thesis is a pilot and an opportunity to test the hypothesis that the political is embedded within the poetical of Jendela's early art, and thus these artworks are neither apolitical nor politically insignificant.

To carry out my investigation, I employed three main strategies. Firstly, I advanced and applied an interpretive framework – the *political in the poetic* – to locate the political resonances within Jendela's poetic sensibilities. This allowed an appreciation of how Jendela's artistic decisions are in fact situated within, and

emerge from, Reformasi Indonesia's social and political conditions, as well as the different bodies of cultural knowledge and expression that comprise and influence Indonesian artists' habitus. Secondly, this undertaking benefited significantly from the direct commentary by the artists, as they spoke for the first time on why they made art poetically during a time of great political tensions, and addressed questions on specific artworks. These comments demonstrate Jendela did not shun the socio-political realities of the time, but instead made their perspectives and positions felt through poetic works of art. Thirdly, to illustrate these arguments, this thesis analysed both primary and secondary sources such as published interviews of the group, exhibition reviews and catalogue essays and added original close readings of primary sources by examining specific artworks as case studies to demonstrate how contextual factors, other discourses, and commentaries by the artists manifested themselves in the visual and material choices behind the works.

The specific case studies discussed in this thesis also offer a comparative view across the three artwork themes: *Coretan (Transient Lines)*, *Bayangan Bentuk (Allusion of Form)*, and *Jiwa Ketok (Visible Soul)*. In each of these themes, common attributes can be discerned and taken together to facilitate a view of distinct iterations of the political and the poetic in Jendela's early works. These shared qualities are:

1. Jendela created a poetical art language which engaged *rasa*: faculties of emotion, reflection and imagination to express *alam*: their world in the larger view of politically transformative time. By doing so, they were exalting their individuality and origins into their artistic choices as an act of identity politics. In choosing not to conform to the prevailing opinions and art trends of Yogyakarta, is in itself imbued with political significance.

2. Jendela's poetical enquiries on the everyday and ordinary engendered new perspectives on the overlooked and ignored aspects of life in a politically fraught

time. For example, during this period, ordinary people and their experiences were excluded from heroic narratives, and the broader, complex systems of power underlining daily life. By focusing on the everyday and ordinary moments of Indonesian life, rather than dramatic events in Indonesian history, Jendela expressed subtle messages with political resonances, subverting the conditions and conventions associated with what is considered 'important' enough as a basis for making art.

3. Jendela's poetical sensibilities were generative of perspectives from which to consider the political. By emphasising the everyday over the national and heroic, Jendela brought forward a political agenda by bringing to light and prominence those people who were otherwise erased and obscured. Additionally, they displayed a desire to move away from established order and create new structures.

4. An alternative question might be, how can the art and practice of early Jendela enrich our understanding of the political in the poetical of art? There are several possible answers, starting with significant findings in each of the thematic chapters that shall be elaborated.

The poetic sensibilities of *coretan* emerging from the textual and metaphorical qualities inherent in Minang culture encapsulated the political. This was demonstrated in the artists' unsettling examination of Reformasi's tensions, which were emulated in the emotional intensity of fragmented lines, mark-making and deliberate ambiguity of unintelligible writing fragments. The political in the poetic was evident in Handiwirman's untitled abstract landscape, in which his ascetic search for an aesthetic truth in *coretan* elucidated his struggles and those on the fringes of society. His decision to make art guided by *rasa*, and inspired by disenfranchised Suyar, has political resonances too, as it does not follow the conventions of art that privileged polemical and heroic political art. On the other hand, Yunizar's *Surat*

Perintah made in the likeness of an official warrant letter showed the political resonances of *coretan* through the employment of illegibility in the process of writing and image making. For “illegibility of this kind can be seen as a form of social resistance, as well as a confrontation with the limits of signification.”¹⁵¹ Finally, the enactments of graffiti on a re-representation of the Indonesian national flag in Rudi’s *Tarik Mimpi (Pulled Dream)*, suggested the political resonance of *coretan* as an act of antagonism. For graffiti “is one of the most accessible strategies recording dissent, indignation, and rage in public space.”¹⁵² Thus, *coretan* is politically significant for its symbolic irreverence for authority and artistic autonomy to make a personal statement about the times and failed dreams.

The political and the poetic was also investigated through the theme of *Bayangan Bentuk (Allusion of Form)*. These poetic investigations focused on the often ignored and overlooked aspects of daily living which highlighted the invisible yet communicable systems of power governing life. Jendela did this by unpacking the social and political significance of everyday material and form through acute observations and reflection guided by the concept of *alam* that emphasised knowledge through an awareness of the environment. To underscore this point Rudi’s choice of industrial plastic over a traditional sculptural medium for the site-specific installation *Menjaring Keyakinan (Suspension of Belief)* was to elevate the significance of a common yet unnoticed modern day material. Similarly, Handiwirman’s site-specific installation *Patah Hati (Broken Heart)* explored perceptible traces of invisible forces like gravity through the use of simple domestic materials like wood, threads and knives to suggest the fragile nature of power. It also alluded to the downfall of the big and powerful due to unseen forces of nature.

¹⁵¹ Johanna Malt, *Cy Twombly: Sign, Meta-Sign and Sense*, Sillages critiques 2016, accessed 23 December 2019, <https://journals.openedition.org/sillagescritiques/4671>.

¹⁵² “Tercerunquinto on Graffiti,” *Art Forum Magazine*, Summer 2017, accessed 18 August 2020 <https://www.artforum.com/print/201706/tercerunquinto-on-graffiti-68679>.

Lastly, Handiwirman's *Kiri Baru (the New Left)* demonstrated the politics of perception through the compositional experiment of inverted mirrored reflections of commonplace items to show that what is left or right is conditioned by vantage points.

Finally, the thematic chapter *Jiwa Ketok (Visible Soul)* had shown Jendela's representations of the body as a "potent signifier of lived experience as well as a medium of formal and aesthetic enquiry" on the "politics of identity."¹⁵³ By invoking the poetic concepts of *rasa* and *jiwa ketok* that emphasised the inner realms of emotions, intuition and imagination, Jendela produced provocative, painterly abstractions of the body by channelling the emotional intensity of *coretan* lines into figurative drawings. Presented as conditions of physiological and psychological tensions, these drawings were ways to accentuate how the body's interior was ensnared by the exterior pressures of the social, political and historical. Jumaldi's series of introspective self-portraits *Pencari Ketenangan (Peace Seeker)*, offer a persuasive example of how the personal is political. By evoking poetic philosophies of *rasa* and *jiwa ketok*, Jumaldi transcribed his deep seated memories of displacement and burdens as a cultural outsider into these emotionally charged distortions of the body to illuminate his struggles as a dispossessed artist living within the conditions of troubled political times. On the other hand, Handiwirman's figures in *Duduk/Berdiri (Sit/Stand)* and *Dua Tangan (Two Hands)* stripped down into images of raw flesh devoid of any identity, social or class signifiers, illustrate the body as a politically loaded form through articulations and gestures that enact acts of resistance, confrontation, and resignation. By obscuring the identities of his figures and distorting them into unrecognisable entities, Handiwirman was forcing a gaze on these bodies like specimens on view to highlight the objectification of the other or the outsider, which could be argued to be an embodiment of this thesis' theme on the political significance of identity in Jendela's early poetical work.

¹⁵³ Sally O'Reilly, *The Body in Contemporary Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2018), 8.

Through these case studies' arguments for the political resonances in Jendela's poetic sensibilities, this thesis has shown how Jendela's poetic language has the power to make indirect commentary on the political utilising numerous cultural factors derived from Jendela's Minangkabau heritage and responding to the contextual political traumas of the PRRI-Permesta Rebellion that once struck West Sumatra. This thesis has demonstrated how political conditions changed, artistic strategies were also developed. By considering factors such as *habitus* and the Minangkabau cultural coding of the language, so much can be gleaned from Jendela's art. Without an understanding of these contexts, such esoteric significances would not be so apparent.

After considering the relationship between the political resonances in the poetic sensibilities in Jendela's early works, the findings imply a new understanding of how the element of the performative body underscores greatly in these works. This element of the performative body is evident in how the artists lived experiences, actions, intuition and subconscious manifest themselves in the formal elements of *coretan* (lines) and *jiwa ketok* (body), as well as how new experiences are made through material interaction with the situational reality of external spaces such as the site specific installations of *bayangan bentuk* (form). I suggest this aspect of the performative body is noteworthy as it renders a different perspective to Jendela's artworks which had been discussed predominantly in the realm of the material and the formal. This thesis' exposition suggests that the key to understanding Jendela is actually in its immateriality by which the group had shown to devise a specific methodology employing the poetic that goes along with the performative to produce meaning in their art that is linked to its historical, contextual, and epistemological origins and therefore charged with political resonances.¹⁵⁴ This thesis which began

¹⁵⁴ For future research trajectories on Jendela concerning the performative body, I refer to art historian and curator, Dorothea von Hantelmann's *The Experiential Turn* that examines the increasing significance of "experience" in contemporary artworks from a twofold perspective, starting with phenomenological space in which art is presented and experienced and fundamental economic and cultural transformations that underlie it. According to Elizabeth

with the theme of *coretan* and followed Handiwirman's aesthetic, cross-country journey where his encounters with the real, everyday struggles of people showed profound influences in his determination of form. It recalls a similar aesthetic rite of passage by Nashar, Jendela's modern predecessor from Sumatra; after an encounter with poet Chairil Anwar, a well-known forerunner of modern Indonesian poetry, who remarked, "Nashar you toil day and night to paint the themes that plumb the depths of the human soul but it lacks something because you do not really know what real sadness really is." This comment triggered Nashar, like Handiwirman, to embark on a journey of artistic self-discovery by which his experiences on the road witnessing everyday human plight prefigured into the self-made philosophy, *Tiga Nons (Three Nons)*.¹⁵⁵ These artists' processes are important to highlight for they circle back to the point on the production of meaning in art shaped by 'experiences' that is known as *pengalaman* in the Indonesian language, which in turn springs from the root word and concept of *alam*, one of the core poetic concepts underlining this thesis.

It could be suggested that Jendela's poetical language — which turned to the inner, intangible qualities of emotions, intuition and imagination — attempted to transcend the obvious materialistic greed that prevailed during the New Order regime. The Reformasi movement brought to light such endemic corruption and abuses of power for private gain — issues that collapsed the economy and catalysed nation-wide humanitarian tragedy. Thus, in a time of political transformations and the dissolution of ideals, Jendela's desire to move away from established orders to create new aesthetic codes can be argued to be politically significant.

Carpenter, von Hantelmann referenced "sociological texts such as Gerhard Schulze's Experience Society to make the case for the artistic shift to the creation of experiences, which had become a central focus of cultural, social and economic activity." To adopt this approach in future, similar sociological texts related to Indonesian contexts would be the key. Elizabeth Carpenter, "Living Collections Catalogue on Performativity," *Walker Art Center*, accessed 19 December 2020, <http://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/introduction/>.

¹⁵⁵ Gesyada Siregar, "Three-Nons. A Principle on Making Meaningful Art," *TEDxUI*, accessed 19 December 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0lwGwVhYwOI>.

This study's limitation is that most of its findings are based on my interpretations. However, these interpretations are grounded in extensive research, as shown in the literature review, which laid the foundation for my research questions and methodology.

There are two main limitations to this study which are located in the interviews and the literature review. The first concerns the interviews whereby the author is cognisant of a possibility that this could be viewed as 'selection bias' in the sampling of participants for it was confined only to the artists of Jendela. The interviews were designed in such a manner because the views by the artists themselves on their early poetic works produced in a time of a major political event have yet to be articulated and documented in comparison to the published comments by curators and art critics that currently exists. Therefore, this thesis needed to seek new perspectives from the artists themselves. To mitigate this research endeavour is not led by bias, the interviews were carried out through a structured method of enquiry whereby the same set of questions approved by the university's review board to ensure that were no leading questions, was discussed with each artist. To further demonstrate a detachment on the author's part with the interviews, highlighted here are observations arising from the interviews that are critical of the artists' irreverence for political art through views of their contemporaneous art collectives and artists in Yogyakarta who were engaging with the political. Starting with the remarks below, Jumaldi spoke of the futility of engaging political conditions outside the studio in the early years when the group were still searching for their artistic identity,

For me, what are we talking about politics if we are not there. That's like masturbating. We talk about politics, but apparently we are only in the studio, we just paint. Maybe for other artists, that's at artistic attitude, making statements. However, for me, we don't want to make something into art if we

are not there. So that's why. Here, what I'm drawing is me. What I paint is my condition. I do not want to paint the conditions outside me, about the social, emotional of others. For Jendela, we do see ourselves more deeply. What the heck are we? And finally it became different because of that. The others were busy observing conditions outside, while Jendela was absorbed in observing oneself.¹⁵⁶

Notwithstanding Jumaldi's remarks, Handiwirman was open towards exploring political art discourse although he maintained scepticism of such views that were different to his beliefs,

I remember the year was 1998, I voted no matter what people's choice was. I was also often invited to participate in the work of the art collective Taring Padi. Yes, I'll come in, and hear everything but yet I do not agree. Then I did not have any friends. Around this time I returned to Padang because I did not see it the same. I do not have the same beliefs, so I am a little sceptical actually, not sure I can change this.¹⁵⁷

Meanwhile, Rudi viewed polemical, political art as a poor reflection of creativity because it lacked unique artistic qualities,

The spirit of searching for language is what we see, that fellow peers use reportage, reporting methods, some express dislike without contemplation,

¹⁵⁶ Jumaldi Alfi, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, MPEG-4, 00:15:45-00:17:04.

Untuk saya itu, ngapain ngomongin politik kalau kita tidak di sana. Itu seperti masturbasi aja. Kita ngomongin politik, tapi ternyata kita cuma di studio, kita melukis aja. Mungkin buat teman-teman seniman yang lain, itu sikap seniman, pernyataan. Tapi buat saya itu, kita tidak mau menjadikan sesuatu menjadi objek kalau kita ngga di sana. Nah makanya. Di sini, yang saya gambar itu saya. Yang saya lukis itu adalah kondisi saya. Saya ngga ingin melukis kondisi di luar saya, tentang sosial, emosional orang lain. Di Jendela itu. Kita memang lebih melihat kita sendiri ke dalam. Apa sih sebenarnya kita. Dan akhirnya menjadi beda karena itu. Yang lain-lain itu sibuk mengamati kondisi di luar, sementara Jendela mengamati diri sendiri.

¹⁵⁷ Handiwirman Saputra, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 2 December 2019, MPEG-4, 00:21:25-00:22:03.

"Tahun '98 itu -- sebenarnya saya ingatnya saya memilih tidak peduli sama pilihan orang. Di Taring Padi pun saya juga sering diajak ikut. Ya masuk aja, saya ikut dengar omongan semuanya. Ya saya ngga setuju. Lalu aku ngga punya teman. Tapi waktu itu aku pulang ke Padang, karena aku ngga ngelihat itu sama. Aku ngga mempunyai kepercayaan sama, jadi agak skeptis sih sebetulnya, ngga yakin bisa merubah ini."

without concluding with a metaphor so that the language can be richer than meaning. That is, in terms of the common thread that binds our group that we could agree that language is simple, modest.¹⁵⁸

Some of the issues arising from such commentary by Jendela relate specifically to the group's insularity and resistance to engage with artistic practitioners in Yogyakarta whose conceptual and aesthetic concerns are different. Though focusing narrowly on themselves may have been beneficial in the early incubation process as a collective, they also missed an opportunity to enrich or evolve their practice by engaging with the diverse new artistic developments taking place in a major intellectual centre like Yogyakarta at a time of profound political transformation. This might be a probable cause on Jendela's part, where the group's lack of interaction or integration with the larger artistic communities of Yogyakarta could have led to a misunderstanding about the group's early practice.

The second limitation is in the literature review due to the scarcity of prior research studies. There is very little prior research that concerns this specific topic that had been analysed through the lens of the political and the poetic. Furthermore, the established ideas of the political and poetic identified in the literature review are mostly western definitions and frameworks that may not be fully applicable for the appraisal of Jendela in the context of Indonesia. Nonetheless, I had attempted to define the political and poetic as well as its relationship through established ideas, and further developing an interpretive framework 'the political in the poetic' to discuss the political and poetic contexts of Jendela, that is Yogyakarta during Reformasi, and the cultural habitus of Jendela known as the Minangkabau in West Sumatra. The formation of an interpretive framework informed by the contexts of

¹⁵⁸ Rudi Mantofani, interview with author, Yogyakarta, 1 December 2019, MPEG-4, 00:01:50-00:02:37.

Semangat mencari berbahasa itulah yang kita lihat, bahwa teman-teman menggunakan cara laporan reportase, ada yang mengungkapkan ketidaksuksesannya tanpa kontemplasi, tanpa menyimpulkan dengan metafor sehingga bahasanya bisa lebih kaya daripada makna. Na itulah, secara garis benang merahnya, kita sepakat bahwa berbahasa itu sederhana. Sederhana bukan berarti apa adanya. Sederhana itu sudah melewati penyeleksian.

the political and the poetical helped frame the analysis of the artwork case studies, which were further enhanced by interviews conducted with the artists. To surmise, these limitations can be considered as an important opportunity for further development in the area of study.

As a pilot project, my thesis had set out to demonstrate that this research is worthwhile for the new knowledge it can shed about the group. Thus, I recommend that further studies of artists and collectives operating in similar contexts adopt a similar framework in the appraisal and examination of artistic production. In light of this new knowledge on Jendela, this study hopes to illuminate the significance of the group's early works and realign its status in the world of Indonesian contemporary art.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. The Jendela Art Group: Handiwirman Saputra, Jumaldi Alfi, Rudi Mantofani, Yusra Martunus, Yunizar and Mohammad Irfan, 1999. In *Jendela: From a Window*, page 16, Bali: Hotel Padma, 1999. Image courtesy of Tony Godfrey.

Figure 2. Rudi Mantofani, “Tarik Mimpi (Pulled Dream),” 2002, Acrylic on canvas, 200 x 120 cm. In *Rudi Mantofani Cakrawala Ganda*, page 5, Jakarta: Nadi Gallery, 2002. Image courtesy of IVAA.

Figure 3. Handiurman Saputra, "Untitled," 1998, Oil on canvas, 145 x 195 cm. In *The Philip Morris Group of Companies: ASEAN Art Awards 1998*, Hanoi: Hanoi Fine Arts College and Ho Chi Minh Fine Arts Museum, 1998. Image courtesy of Gajah Gallery Singapore.

Figure 4. Yunizar, “Surat Perintah (Warrant Letter),” 1999, Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 95 cm. In *Sotheby’s Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Paintings Sale*, 6 October 2008. Image from: <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.805.html/2008/modern-and-contemporary-southeast-asian-paintings-hk0275>. (Accessed 20 July 2019).

Figure 5. Rudi Mantofani, “Menjaring Keyakinan (Suspension of Belief),” 2000, Plastic, stainless steel, 300 x 300 cm. In *Jendela: Membuka Kemungkinan (Jendela: Opening Possibilities)*, page 22, Yogyakarta: Purna Budaya and Jakarta: Galarie Cipta II TIM, 2000. Image courtesy of Gajah Gallery Singapore.

Figure 6. Handiwirman Saputra, “Patah Hati (Broken Hearted),” 2001, Wood, thread, copper, dimensions variable. In *Jendela: Estaticus Mundi*, page 12, Bandung: Selesar Sunaryo, 2002. Image courtesy of Gajah Gallery Singapore.

Figure 7. Handi Wirman Saputra, “Kiri Baru (The New Left),” 1999, Mixed media on canvas, 130 x 150 cm. In *Handi Wirman Saputra: Saat Bentuk Menjadi Kelakuan (The Moment when Form becomes Action)*, page 65, Tokyo: Nadi Gallery, 2015. Image courtesy of Gajah Gallery Singapore.

Figure 8.1. Jumaldi Alf, “Pencari Ketenangan (Peace Seeker),” 2003, Oil on canvas, 70 x 70 cm each, Triptych. In *Alfi*, page 58-60, Yogyakarta: 2008. Image courtesy of author.

Figure 8.2 and 8.3. Jumaldi Alfi, “Pencari Ketenangan (Peace Seeker),” 2003, Oil on canvas, 70 x 70 cm each, Triptych. In *Alfi*, page 58-60, Yogyakarta: 2008. Image courtesy of author.

Figure 9. Handiwirman Saputra, “Duduk/Berdiri (Sit/Stand),” 1999, Mixed media on canvas, 150 x 130 cm. In *Handiwirman Saputra: Saat Bentuk Menjadi Kelakuan (The Moment when Form becomes Action)*, page 63, Tokyo: Nadi Gallery, 2015. Image courtesy of Tony Godfrey.

Figure 10. Handiwirman Saputra, “Dua Tangan (Two Hands),” 1999, Mixed media on canvas, 150 x 130 cm. In *Jendela: From a Window*, page 9, Bali: Hotel Padma, 1999. Image courtesy of Gajah Gallery Singapore.

APPENDIX A: ARTISTS BIOGRAPHIES

1. Jumaldi Alfi (born 1975, Lintau, West Sumatra, Indonesia)

Jumaldi Alfi, co-founder of Jendela is recognised for paintings of imaginary landscapes or self-portraits that convey existential and spiritual reflections. He is particularly known for his *Color Guide* and *Blackboard* series notable for its illusionary character which he achieves by breaking the pictorial space through elemental aspects of foreground, horizon and suggestions of space. Jumaldi's practice extends beyond the painting studio. During his student days, he was already active in creating platforms for discourse and promotion with fellow colleagues, who had come from various parts of Indonesia to central Java. Other than Jendela, he was the driving force in the founding of artists' groups of Sumatran origin such as *Sanggar Sakato* and the founder of contemporary art space *Sanggar* in Yogyakarta.

2. Handiwirman Saputra (born 1975, Bukittinggi, Sumatra, Indonesia)

Creating sublime beauty from simple or mundane materials, Handiwirman Saputra, co-founder of Jendela is known for artworks that are acute study of objects and make new visual compositions of nature. An adept sculptor and painter, he straddles between two to three dimensional mediums to create evocative works of art that trigger new perspectives on the quotidian on either the monumental or miniature scale. This shift in scale further spurs the viewer to reconsider their relationship with the everyday materials involved. He then allows others into his perception of the world, a perspective which gives power to the ordinary.

3. Rudi Mantofani (born 1973, Padang, Sumatra, Indonesia)

A sculptor and a painter, the works of Rudi Mantofani are known for their realism and irony. He sees aesthetic potential in common items but presents these in new contexts that twist the original functions of objects. Rudi constantly attempts to find new, pared-down metaphors of symbolic expression: a rock, a twisted string, a sliced

fruit, often juxtaposed against vast, hauntingly barren landscapes. His works alternate between surrealism and abstraction, frequently conjoining two disparate modes into a perspective that is unique to the artist. Characteristic of Rudi's visual language is the removal of the human figure, and the preference to prompt readings into the human condition by way of creating encounters with objects which are simultaneously mundane in origination and yet made surprising in their manner of scale and manipulation.

4. Yunizar (born 1971, Talawi, Sumatra, Indonesia)

Yunizar, unlike most members of Jendela whose works are defined by technical perfection, devotes his artistic explorations in search for an expression of simplicity. In his depictions of everyday objects, the works of Yunizar clearly indicate a shift away from realism and symbolic formalism. His unique approach is embodied in crudely drawn paintings in simple, black outlines on canvas depicting daily objects. At other times he moves away from multiplicity by displacing it with a singular motif, such as a figure or a head unsmiling, disfigured and consumed by a sense of estrangement or exile. A distinctive series in Yunizar's oeuvre is *Coretan* characterised by the use of lines, markings and text deployed as frantic utterance – obfuscating and never declaring any form of intent, yet filled with possibilities insisting intuition and experience as a primary form of aesthetic encounter.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The interview framework consisted of two parts. First, the questions were designed to get at the ‘heart’ of who the artists are so as to hear the story of their artistic beginnings, journey and recollections as a collective in their formative years. The second part of the interview had questions that focused on their conceptual and aesthetic developments, discussing selected works and working in a time of great social, political and artistic change. Four out of the five members of Jendela agreed to the interviews.¹⁵⁹ Though each of the artists in this study had a unique and independent style, common ground could still be found in their early works.

Through the process of analysis and contextualisation, this thesis sets out to fulfil three objectives. The first is to develop an interpretive framework - the *political in the poetic* - to approach and analyse the political significance of Jendela’s metaphorical works. Second, I show how Jendela explorations in the formal properties of art such as lines, form, materials and the body in the three thematic categories of *Coretan* (*Transient lines*), *Bayangan Bentuk* (*Allusion of Form*) and *Jiwa Ketok* (*Visible Soul*), can reveal universal truths about the human condition in transformative times. Finally, I demonstrate how identities and individual subjectivities not in a dominant social order can have political resonance through coded works of art employing poetic strategies.

Interview Questions

1. Collective Dynamics

- i. How and why did the group maintain a collective ethos while navigating individual positions?
- ii. What were the disagreements and tensions within the group and how it might have impacted the collective?

¹⁵⁹ Yusra Martunus who did not respond to a request for an interview.

2. Artists from Sumatra destabilising the stronghold of Javanese peers in Yogyakarta

- i. Could the misreading of their works be brought about because of cultural differences?
- ii. Though Jendela had claimed not to be bound by an ethnic spirit, why are all the members from Sumatra?
- iii. What was the impact of *Reformasi* in their practice during this period of study?
- iv. To what extent did they feel shunned by Yogyakarta's left-leaning art world and what bearing this would have on their approach to art making?

3. The Oratorical in the Visual

- i. Why does 'the poetic' have a central role in Jendela conceptual and formal concerns?
- ii. To what extent did Jendela turned to the oratorical culture of their *Minangkabau* roots to formulate the group's conceptual and aesthetic concerns.
- iii. Why did they turn to the poetic to express opinions and perspectives on the social realities of its time?
- iv. Who are the literary figures that had influenced and shaped their artistic development?

4. Artworks for visual analysis of this study

- i. Discussion with the artists on the ideas and processes behind artworks selected for visual analysis.

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