Yvonne Spielmann

Contemporary Indonesian Art: Artists, Spaces, and Collections. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2017, ix + 178 pp. ISBN 9789814722360, price: USD 42.00 (cloth).

Yvonne Spielmann's *Contemporary Indonesian Art* is an essential read for those interested in the development of Indonesian art in the Reformation era. It may be the first comprehensive book since Jim Supangkat's *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*, successfully bringing together scholarship made in Indonesia since the 1990s (especially in Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Jakarta). Its originality resides in its focus on artists, spaces, and collections, a circumstance that allows it to go beyond the usual art historical narrative. It reveals the specificities of the Indonesian art world, which it conveys straightforwardly and from an insiders' perspective. It demonstrates how these three bodies interact locally, regionally, and internationally. These categories are justified by the fact that while contemporary art from Indonesia 'meets the standards of global art' (p. 107), the lack of state sponsorship for the arts has produced a substitute network of relations between artists, galleries, and collectors, which are the arts' most relevant patrons and supporters. It is equally this group of local aficionados that backed up the most recent pushes toward international recognition, both locally and internationally. The book itself results from these efforts (p. viii).

Chapter 1 situates the book's focus in time and scope. First, it proposes that to study Indonesian art, new criteria, which include the local context of production, must be taken into account. Second, it conveys the Indonesian reality, especially that of the *Reformasi* era. Indonesia is now a confident player in the global art market that has expanded uninterruptedly since the 1990s, when it offered few opportunities for artists. In the 1990s, going overseas coupled with a growing class of curators meant that Indonesian art was effectively transmitted to foreign audiences who were unaware of local conditions. The post-2000 attention granted by local art galleries and the increasing institutionalization of Indonesian art globally characterizes the successful moment it currently enjoys. Third, it enumerates the reasons for a smaller sample of women artists in the country, while providing its most relevant players (pp. 15–22). Fourth, it presents Indonesia in the context of Southeast Asia. Indonesia is one of the founding ASEAN nations and a major part of Southeast Asian politics and economics in regional and international affairs. Spielmann presents a comparative study, which focuses on each country's current art circumstances while offering an overview of each particular development (pp. 22–41). She argues that a decisive factor for the emergence of contemporary art in the region relates to the postcolonial agenda, which when coupled with each nation's own history, has provided disparate results in terms of education, institutionalization,

and creative solutions (pp. 40–41). This comparative analysis significantly contributes to the growing field of Southeast Asian Studies, and more specifically to the ongoing construction of Southeast Asian art history.

Chapter 2 starts with an account of Indonesian political history. It suggests that art thinking and developments were shaped by a resistance against foreign occupiers, and identifies racist separatism as a major factor for the awakening of local discourse (p. 63). The following Indonesian period has witnessed various phases, some leaning toward Western art (Suharto's New Order) and others away from its precepts (Sukarno's era). Spielmann recognizes that the most influential practices of Indonesian modern art are characterized by the anchoring of both local traditions and Western modern art (p. 58). This situation continues, as evidenced by the majority of artists showing references to history and tradition. As younger generations enter the discourse, a tendency toward detachment becomes increasingly apparent (p. 106). In its reference to the classic binary of the two streams created by the academies of Yogyakarta and Bandung (pp. 67–73), it proposes that a rapprochement has been effectuated since the 1980s, when several media conflated in a single artwork (p. 69). This closeness has resulted in a dissolution of the boundaries of tradition and modern (p. 75).

The study focuses mainly on the triangle Jakarta-Bandung-Yogyakarta, which concentrates most gallerists, curators, and artists, respectively. Collectors and art galleries are generally separate from artists, with Yogyakarta aggregating the biggest national artist community, attracted by the confluence of art spaces where the free-thinking tradition of *sanggars* (art communities) remains alive (p. 72). However, it overlooks the region of Bali, for it considers Balinese development outside of the discourse of Indonesian modern and contemporary art (p. 63). The sections it devotes to collectors (pp. 73–84), art galleries (pp. 84–92), art spaces, and art fairs (pp. 92–102) reveals the intricacies of their roles in shaping discourse while it identifies the power relations that characterize the Indonesian art world. Collectors act primarily as patrons (p. 14), but they also constitute important educators who feel morally responsible for arts' development (p. 13). Art galleries are recognized as having greatly contributed to the making of Indonesian art historical discourse and art's visibility on the art market (p. 86). These interventions contrast widely with state institutions who offer no or little support (p. 86). The section 'Art spaces, Media, and Art Fairs' (pp. 92–102) provides a good inventory of additional strategies that equally helped position Indonesian contemporary art in the world stage.

Chapter 3 focuses primarily on individual artists. It starts by pointing to those measures needed to foster independence from the still dominant West, namely the universality of Western-style modernism and the imagery created

by Europeans and practiced by local artists under colonial rule, such as the *Mooi Indië* style (p. 110). A sense of personal gravitas fostered rupture, which was predominant during Sukarno's era but interrupted under Suharto's rule, which valued internationalism (p. 105). It goes on tracing the two most relevant generations of artists, from the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, and in the 2000s, respectively (p. 106). While these two generations demonstrate how culture matters, their practices differ. Past is present, as it is said, but the two generations offer a striking contrast of reinterpretations and deconstructions (p. 109). The Indonesian artists analyzed (pp. 111–167) constitute a significant sample of the country's art, and were selected with 'the aim of presenting critical art and art as criticism of the present' (p. 108). The author aptly covers all the main themes and their respective formal tendencies: political art, historical criticism and increasing homogenization, appropriation of tradition, and messages of discontent against rising fundamentalism. These are applied through the strategies of the ready-made, self-portraiture, performance, installation art, photorealistic and textiles works, demonstrating the variety of media available to Indonesian practitioners.

Contemporary Indonesian Art is an important read for all those that want to be introduced to the field of Indonesian art history, and one significant resource for educators. Spielmann's articulate writing style which includes multiple references might be difficult for some readers to keep track of. Yet, the book effectively shows the breadths and dynamics of the art scene among contemporary Indonesian artists at home and abroad.

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Reference

Supangkat, J. (1997). *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*. Jakarta: Indonesia Fine Arts Foundation.