



Agan Harahap, known by different titles, such as the “*master photoshopper*”, “*internet troll*”, “*viral superstar*” or “*digital manipulator*”, is one of the most prominent contemporary artist from his generation on the photography scene. He comes from Indonesia, a country with a very high social media usage globally.

His works question our dependence on photography to inform us on reality.

The artist concentrates on portraits since the identity and behaviour of their characters is closely related to the reality of the Indonesian society. **The Exhibition “The Social Realism of Argan Harahap” at the Mizuma Gallery in Singapore** shows that not only does he use digital imaging, but he also discovers another tool of artistic exploration: he appropriates a series of paintings by Indonesian art maestros from the 1940s through the 1960s: Hendra Gunawan, S. Sudjojono, Basuki Abdullah and Dullah. Most of these paintings embody the Indonesian Social Realism manifesto of those times and mean to express the grand narratives of nationalism.

By “borrowing” these paintings, the artist succeeds in obtaining a revelatory contrast and communicates with sheer clarity his own version of Social Realism. He might have had to “manipulate” master paintings, but he certainly can grab the viewer’s attention on rethinking the social truth of the Indonesian society. By pointing to the present *Zeitgeist* of fake news, hoax and media wars consumption, Agan Harahap turns his art into a powerful medium for involving the public opinion on the divisive world we live in today.



Kerokan © Hendra Gunawan / Digital copy / Courtesy of Mizuma Gallery

Roxana Florina Popa: On the one hand, you intend to reflect the “real change” in the Indonesian society and on the other hand, you digitally manipulate images by making celebrities their main characters. Are there different reactions and emotions to these two results?

Agan Harahap: Celebrities are commodities who until these days are still sought by people. If you add a simple juxtaposition, it makes these celebrities seem as if they were involved in the everyday life of common Indonesians.

To many people, the first reaction is, of course, humour, but if you observe my edited photos further, especially if you are an Indonesian, you will experience the irony and satire.



Maka Lahirlah Angkatan '66 / 2017 © Agan Harahap / C-print on paper / Digital copy / Courtesy of Mizuma Gallery

RFP: How can an artist use social media to further the purpose of his art?

AH: As an artist who relies on smart phone and social media on a daily basis, I see that there are 2 main things when an artist uses social media as part of his/her work. Firstly, an artist is inspired by many events and things that happen on his/her timeline. And secondly, artists can use social media as a means to distribute his/her works. Or even both.



Diponegro Memimpin Pertempuran / 2017 © Agan Harahap / C-print on paper / Digital copy / Courtesy of Mizuma Gallery



Diponegro Memimpin Pertempuran © Basuki Abdullah / Digital copy / Courtesy of Mizuma Gallery



Keep your need up -They don't want you to win - Drug Life / Doves 2017 © Agan Harahap / C-print on paper / Digital copy / Courtesy of Mizuma Gallery



Doves © Lee Man Fong / Digital copy / Courtesy of Mizuma Gallery

RFP: They say your photoshopped works have anonymously been ripped off in online media. Why do you think this happens?

AH: Who said? Hahahaa. I have never used the term “steal”. I always use the word “borrow”. Digital distribution is limitless and everyday we are bombarded with thousands of images through smart phone or computer screen. It is only normal if there is one or two of my works that are borrowed by people. And I don't regard it as a problem. In fact, I am happy when my works can spread as wide as possible.

RFP: Would you like to explain for the international audience the Indonesian humour that you mix into your art?

AH: Very difficult. Each country has its own characteristics. It happens that I am comfortable with using local jokes and my works happen to be directed for the social media users of Indonesia. Moreover, I have not thought about expanding the distribution channel of my works to a wider region.

RFP: What is the difference between your works and a selfie? What kind of statement do your portraits display and what kind of statement does a selfie display?

AH: The difference is obvious, I use a tripod, DSLR and timer. While selfie uses selfie stick or a phone camera.

I seldom put myself in my works. A few years ago, there was a trend in Indonesian jokes that vulgarly explored one's identity (this trend was started by standup comedians like Tukul Arwana, Soleh Solihun etc).

The reason why I included myself in my works was merely to follow the trend of the comedy at that time. Also, I felt that I was representing Indonesians as a whole.



Mentjari Kutu Rambut 2017 © Agan Harahap / C-print on paper / Digital copy / Courtesy of Mizuma Gallery



Mentjari Kutu Rambut © Hendra Gunawan / Digital copy / Courtesy of Mizuma Gallery



Kuda Dan Pemandangan 2017 © Agan Harahap / C-print on paper / Digital copy / Courtesy of Mizuma Gallery

Special Thanks go to the Artist and to Ms Marsha Tan from Mizuma Gallery

∞ Agan Harahap's latest exhibition is "Mardijker Photo Studio" in the 2016 Singapore Biennale. He graduated from STDI Design and Art College in Bandung, Indonesia where he majored in Graphic Design. Later, he moved to Jakarta and photographed for Indonesian-based music magazine, the Trax Magazine. He held his first solo exhibition in 2009 and has since participated in various photography exhibitions around South Asia and beyond. Agan's photographs depict his subjects in surreal situations that express the realism of his work. The past year has seen Agan Harahap also in the Shanghai Biennale and Bangladesh's Chobi Mela, one of Asia's most respected photography events.

∞ Mizuma Gallery was established in 1994 in Tokyo and since its opening at Gillman Barracks in 2012 in Singapore, it aims at promoting new and promising young artists from South East Asia to the international art scene. The Gallery creates a new vector of dialogue between East Asia and South-East Asia through the exchange of art projects. Mizuma Gallery participates yearly in Art Stage Singapore and Art Basel Hong Kong.