

Syncretism of Java-Islam in Contemporary Art

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Diving Into the Spirituality Of Nasirun

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Nasirun

FOR people generally painting is not more than materialistic business. It will be more clear when we put this art work in relation with market. Painting is not different from any commodities else, so it means that painting is just a “thing” which is saleable. In this logic a painter or painting artist is also not different from just a business man.

In his early career as an artist Nasirun was criticized as a painter which only serving to market. It started when his paintings were bought by a well known collector Oei Hong Djien in the middle of 1990th. From the time his works were hunted by many collectors in Indonesia and foreign.

To the criticism Nasirun was not angry. It was sure that he did not to deny that he got a lot of benefits from market. Nevertheless he has also made proof that market has been not the primary goal of his works. The proof can be seen not only from his personality that so low profile although he has been very success now, but also from his works during the last fifteens years. Now public respect to his works as high quality arts which may be not ignored in contemporary arts development in Indonesia.



"Ngilo" (Looking at the Mirror) by Nasirun

As individual Nasirun, which was born in Cilacap, Central Java, in October, 1965, is so simple and modest. Apparently, he does not like to enjoy his richness in his everyday life style. His simplicity and modesty is also expressed in his paintings and to be the strength of his works.

The simplicities is also sprayed from his works displayed in his solo exhibition in Yogyakarta, in September 28 – October 12, 2009. The exhibition entitled "Salam Bakti" ("Respect To") presented about twenty paintings. So simple, but full of spiritual contents, his works here expressed the syncretism between Javanese culture and Islam. It is really that, for Nasirun, make a painting is not only an action which has to do with aesthetic matter. Make a painting is a spiritual action too. Following Nasirun, create a painting is his one way to make closed relationship with God.



"Kiai Narsisrun" by Nasirun

In an interview with a journalist Nasirun compared himself with his late father who was so religious. "My father used to pray intently (zikir) to make closed relationship with God, but I use the brush and canvas," he said. Nasirun was born and growth in Islamic family. His elementary school was also Islamic school (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) in Cilacap, Central Java. But his family, especially his mother, is also Javanese persons that used to do Javanese spiritual tradition. So, the syncretism between Java and Islam in Nasirun's personality and works is his parents legacies. It is really that this exhibition entitled "Salam Bakti" was to respect his late father and mother.

His work entitled "Wayang Ilang Gapite" for example, according to Nasirun, was inspired by his mother's advice when Nasirun was still young boy. His mother asked Nasirun not to be naughty and always to be honest in order not to fall without the strength as like as wayang (puppet in Javanese traditional performing art) without the supported wood (gapit).

His works are here generally as the result of his struggle in spiritual world. Some paintings are complemented with Arabic calligraphy that mention the name of God. His work, "Ngilo" (Looking at The Mirror), for instance, draw Nasirun with his very long hair, lying flat on the ground, holding a women figure of wayang, in front of mirror. I assume that this painting refers to Nasirun himself that always try to respect to his mother. At the one side of the canvas we can see the Arabic calligraphy and Indonesian translation contains the request to the God. On his other work, "Duh Gusti" (Oh God!), Nasirun also put texts in Arabic, Javanese and Indonesian that mention the name of God.

His work that so interesting is "Kiai Narsisrun" which portray Nasirun wearing "baju koko", "sarung", and "peci" – the clothes that are often used by an Muslim religious leader or teacher (Kiai) in Indonesia. This Kiai Narsisrun hold "kendi" (earthenware flask with a neck and spout used for drinking water). Here there is also some texts written in Arabic and Latin alphabet. This painting is seemed as manifestation of Nasirun obsession to take a role in spiritual world although pass through the art work. Or maybe it is just as a self-mockery because the title of this painting is "Kiai Narsisrun". I assume that the word "Narsisrun" come from word "Narsis" (Narcissism) and Nasirun. It is really that Nasirun is a humorist artist. So, even though want to say something seriously Nasirun still do humorist approach.