



NO PAINT on Canvas

PUSHING BOUNDARIES
THROUGH ART IN TODAY'S
MODERN, GLOBAL AND
PLURALISTIC WORLD



How can one create a painting without applying paint directly to the canvas? This question has lingered for years, but artists today have discovered numerous techniques to explore alternative forms of creating art that do not rely solely on canvas as the medium. Interestingly, in traditional societies

where art seamlessly integrates into everyday life, there exists countless ways for individuals to express themselves through visual culture, often unbeknownst to us.

Art was not typically intertwined with people's daily lives in the modern era. However, in the

mid-1950s, Pop Art emerged and disrupted this notion by incorporating popular and mass culture imagery, challenging the separation between fine art and everyday life. This movement marked the end of the Manifesto era. Indonesian curator Hermanto Soerjanto, in his essay "No Paint on Canvas," highlights how



Ezzam skilfully crafts flower-like sculptures using the dry calluses from his feet, which he then showcases within acrylic boxes. These unique sculptures represent ‘withering,’ a clever play on the word ‘Melayu’ when translated directly into the Melayu language, symbolising his root.

The diverse and extensive range of mediums found in traditional societies is an ideal representation of how contemporary artists in Southeast Asia can assert themselves in this era of identity politics. The mentioned artists testify that contemporary art can be viewed as both a movement and an ideology that celebrates diversity and plurality instead of imposing uniformity. Seeing art as an expression of people who have lived with their culture, tribes, and nation, art grows as human civilisation does.

Pop Art and subsequent movements paved the way for a more liberal approach in terms of media, techniques, and materials used in art creation, ultimately shaping what we now recognise as contemporary art.

The liberal art platform resonates with today’s evolving world as society embraces transnational interactions and diverse cultural perspectives. Art writer Steven Félix-Jäger explains that the contemporary age in the art world celebrates a global and pluralistic outlook, breaking free from uniformity and celebrating the richness of cultures worldwide. Emerging movements challenging hegemony are also evident, extending to the movie industry. According to the Luminate 2023 Entertainment Diversity report, there has been a notable rise in the presence of Asian actors, actresses, and films at the box office, albeit with a relatively low percentage. This trend is further exemplified by the success of Asian-themed movies like “Parasite”, “Everything Everyone All at Once”, “Squid Game”, and others.

The resurgence of ethnicities in fine art began with the 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* and continues today through shows and art fairs that spotlight Asian and Black artists. Soerjanto notes that this trend is also evident in the Southeast Asian contemporary scene, shaping the artists’ approach to their medium and narratives. Southeast Asian artists, influenced by the region’s diverse visual cultures integrated into everyday life, contribute to the global perspective on identity politics. Among these visual cultures is woven works. Although woven fabric may seem mundane, young Indonesian artist Alexander Sebastianus introduces it to contemporary art. In his practice, he explores the decontextualisation, perception, understanding, and ritualisation



of woven works. Despite employing the same techniques, Sebastianus’s artworks exhibit visual distinctions from traditional fabrics.

In addition to the revival of ethnic art forms, another traditional visual culture resurfacing is wayang, the Indonesian puppet doll. Creating wayang kulit with intricate details requires exceptional skill, which Indonesian artist Jumaadi finds captivating. Rather than solely incorporating Javanese mythology into his wayang, he intertwines narratives of family and loves onto buffalo skin, using natural elements as patterns. This fusion of narratives makes his works relatable to global society, despite employing a traditional approach rooted in a specific region of Indonesia.

The narrative that fosters relatability and the desire for acceptance, regardless of one’s origin or appearance, is also evident in the works of Ezzam Rahman. This Singaporean artist frequently explores the theme of cultural identity in his creations, opting for an unconventional medium to convey his thoughts: his skin.

The “No Paint on Canvas” exhibition, curated by Hermanto Soerjanto, is being presented by the ISA Art Gallery to look for a broader understanding and appreciation of art and art forms in Southeast Asia. In this exhibition, contemporary artists will challenge common art practices, push the boundaries, and bring up practices that have been eliminated in the past from fine art. The show will be held from May 19 to July 28, 2023, at the ISA Art Gallery in Wisma 46. It will showcase the works of Alexander Sebastianus, Ari Bayuaji, Ezzam Rahman, Irfan Hendrian, Jumaadi, and Kanchana Gupta.

1. The “No Paint on Canvas” exhibition, curated by Hermanto Soerjanto, is presented by ISA Art Gallery
2. Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 1 Jumaadi SEPASANG CINTA , 2021-2022 Acrylic on buffalo hide 75 x 91cm
3. Ezzam Rahman, Titled “Its Good to Know Who You Are Not”
4. Irfan Hendrian, Titled “oO”
5. ISA Art Gallery, Kanchana Gupta Works Installation