

WLG Reading Group - Session 2: *From silence to speech: witnessing and trauma of the anti-communist mass killings in Indonesian contemporary art* by Dr. Wulan Dirgantoro

Part 1: Introduction

Dadang Christanto's head sculptures express the suffering of victims and lay bare the anguish and grief that are endured in silence. The sincerity and rawness of emotion in his work is due in part to the circumstances of his own father's disappearance when Christanto was a boy during the New Order regime.

Post-New Order, artists still faced censorship issues when showcasing works related to the mass killings, and narratives surrounding the event continued to be deployed by various actors. The subject remains sensitive and controversial in the post-authoritarian era. The text examines how trauma is explored through the works of two contemporary Indonesian contemporary artists, Dadang Christanto and Tintin Wulia. Both artists, now based outside of Indonesia, have shared stories that include the loss of family members in 1965.

Part 2:

Dr. Dirgantoro went around the room asking each participant for their thoughts:

1. Do artists, writers, curators and intellectuals have ethical responsibilities to the public, namely to give space and shape to absent people, objects and cultures, to present violent conflict without perpetuating its logic?
 - a. When you re-live pain, it gives room for other forms of violence.
 - b. Are you speaking for the victims, with them or through them? Ethical issue of whose voice? - a witness of a victim?
 - c. Some victims don't want to be recognised as victims. Instead, they want to be celebrated as survivors who have lived through the trauma
 - d. Are/Will these artistic practices become reparative? Reparative in the sense where it isn't to heal wounds but to progress with healing.
 - e. We have been desensitised by our media-saturated world but artworks seem to have a power to evoke emotions.
 - f. Depicting pain universally or from a personal point of view? Trauma seems to always translate best when told personally. Even when one hasn't lived through the experience, we find similarities between the pain that we encounter.
2. Forgetting vs Remembering
 - a. Dadang Christanto's Wuku sculptures could be related to Nietzsche's notion of active forgetting. Can forgetting banish trauma by integrating it into the identity of the culture? - Not to erase what's happened but to stop making the cultural/community group powerless. Could technology help with this, for example in the case of Tintin Wulia. Mnemotechnologies
 - b. Where do we draw the line between forgetting and remembering?
 - c. Is remembering a good thing? What if victims wish to forget the trauma as people often suppress it?
 - d. Is remembering reconciliation? - since we face our discomforts and acknowledge the past
 - e. There is a lack of acknowledgement from the institutional state about Indonesia's 1965-66 mass killings despite archival documents that circumstantiate the tragedy