

AGAN HARAHAAP

GARDEN FRESH

07 — 30 SEPTEMBER 2012

element
ART SPACE

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Images of animals in art have existed parallel to those of humans since pre-historic times, dating back to 40,000 years ago. Our social, creative, and psychological evolution is inextricably tied to our relationships with animals. Whether it be the taming of the world, resulting in ‘man’s best friend,’ the tethering of the horse which magnified the power and geographical reach of humans, or the pursuit and eventual domestication of herd animals which contributed to the establishment of cities and large concentrations of people (and the growth of culture), they are all part of the trajectory of humanity to this point in time. But this is not just history (and pre-history). The animal remains a powerful subject in contemporary art.

In an age when scientists say they can no longer specify the exact difference between human and animal, living and dead, many contemporary artists have chosen to use animals in their works as the ultimate ‘other,’ as metaphor, as reflection. The attempt to discover what is animal, not surprisingly, leads to a greater understanding of what it means to be human. In *Garden Fresh*, Agan Harahap investigates the shifting boundaries between humans and animals in today’s environment and the complex relationship between art and nature.

Over the last three to four decades, a number of people have begun to question the hierarchies that traditionally placed humans above allegedly lesser species, and these concerns gradually permeated the art of the period. Steve Baker, whose book *The Postmodern Animal* (2000) is a seminal survey of its topic, notes that the resurgence of animal imagery in contemporary art coincided with the birth of the animal rights movement in the 1970s. While animals had been a recurrent if not dominant motif in Western art through the 19th century, the subject was of surprisingly little interest to early 20th century modernists. With a few

notable exceptions (such as Franz Marc’s vibrant cows and horses), the modern avant-garde either used animals as mere pretexts for formal experimentation or ignored them entirely. However, by June 2000 the situation had changed so dramatically that *The New York Times* could announce, “Animals Have Taken Over Art.”

Joseph Beuys, whose works have a large influence on many contemporary Indonesian artists, was among the first contemporary artists to engage animal subject matter in a sustained, substantive manner. “How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare” (1965) and “Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me” (1974) were attempts to establish meaningful dialogues with animals that occupy positions of central importance in Eurasian and American mythology respectively. Beuys repeatedly affirmed his personal identification with the hare, which even dead, seemed to him more aesthetically responsive than many humans. By confining himself for a week with a live coyote, the artist endeavored to access invisible spiritual energies that, while common to people and animals alike, have been largely effaced by the mechanistic and materialistic preoccupations of modern-day human society. The coyote—revered by Native Americans for its ability to morph from physical to spiritual form, and persecuted by white colonialists—was also emblematic of humankind’s tendency to project feelings of inferiority onto a minority or other scapegoat. Beuys saw his involvement with animals both as a way to harness latent spiritual powers and as a means to heal the ancient wounds produced by toxic assertions of racial superiority.

In his work, Beuys introduced two strands of inquiry that have remained important for subsequent artists: the exploration of the animal/human divide, and the political implications of that divide. Whereas the coyote “action” was a direct exchange between man

and animal, many contemporary artists recognize that our relationships with animals are invariably mediated by prior pictorial conventions and prejudices. The language of representation thus figures prominently in much recent art. A number of artists have toyed with the sentimentality that infuses popular animal imagery. By decapitating and bisecting his *Split Rocker*, Jeff Koons distances the hobbyhorse from its comforting nursery context. Massive scale is another way of subliminally subverting such kitsch icons—used by Koons in the flower-covered *Puppy* that was installed as an unofficial adjunct to the 1992 Documenta exhibition near Kassel, Germany, and in 2000 at New York’s Rockefeller Center. Ann Craven’s pastel-hued bird paintings similarly undercut Disney-esque references by hugely magnifying their diminutive subjects. In this manner, Craven raises questions about domestication and the means whereby once wild species cohabit in the human environment.

Animals appeal to contemporary artists because they seem so intrinsically wild, and because they have been long admired for their beauty and as symbols of freedom. But instead of taking inspiration from wild animals, the *Garden Fresh* series was influenced by caged animals at the zoo. Harahap was touched by the lives of animals who are imprisoned for the rest of their lives and are forced to serve as a vehicle of attraction and recreation for humans. Humans made much effort to ensure that the animals feel comfortable (by decorating the cage and place a variety of facilities) but surely it could not satisfy the animals’ natural instincts in wild nature. *Garden Fresh* is a fable about a journey undertaken by the animals when they venture into our daily lives. The animals are confronted by a new reality that is in conflict with their natural habits and habitats. In specific, they are invited into one of the central urban food sources for humans—the supermarket—which represents as a fond childhood memory for the artist.

Harahap has always been fascinated by the concept of supermarkets, its eventual dominance in today’s households and the demise of local costermongers in metropolitan cities. The costermonger’s ability to only display fresh produce for a day pales in comparison to the supermarket’s constantly fresh produce display. This stark difference also hints on the separation between low-income and middle class society in Indonesia. Until today, Harahap enjoys visiting supermarkets not to necessarily make a purchase, but to spend the time and observe the displays and their buyers.

By placing the animals in this made-up wilderness, the animals can easily purchase and consume their food yet its un-natural to them—a tiger peeking out from the cold meat section, the pelican overlooking the fresh fish display—just as it is un-natural for humans to purchase from supermarkets and living in high-rise buildings, moving away from nature. At the same time, when we see these ‘zoo-trapped’ animals in supermarkets, their most outstanding characteristics are isolated as their ‘only’ characteristics. Overwhelmingly, the animals are stripped of their own identities and are used as empty vessels to be filled with the human drama of parody, satire and allegory. We cannot help but see animals from a human vantage point, and therefore in some sense all the works in the present exhibition are actually about us.

Aniela Rahardja
Director, Element Art Space

ARTWORKS

Garden Fresh 1

120 x 150 cm
2012





GARDEN FRESH 2

80 x 100 cm
2012

Garden Fresh 3

73 x 150 cm
2012





GARDEN FRESH 4

53 x 170 cm
2012



Garden Fresh 5

120 x 170 cm
2012





GARDEN FRESH 6

120 x 144 cm
2012



GARDEN FRESH 7

165.5 x 120 cm
2012





GARDEN FRESH 8

100 x 150 cm
2012



GARDEN FRESH 9

100 x 163 cm
2012



GARDEN FRESH 10

165 x 120 cm
2012

BIOGRAPHY

AGAN HARAHAP



Born 1980, Jakarta, Indonesia

Education

STDi Design and Art College, Bandung, Indonesia

Residency Program

Mar 2012 Artist in Residency Program by Element Art Space, Singapore

Solo Exhibition

- 2012 Garden Fresh, Element Art Space, Singapore
- 2011 Holy War, Richard Koh Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Singapore Art Stage-Project Stage, Marina Bay, Singapore
SUPERHISTORY, Ion Art Space, Singapore
- 2010 SUPERHISTORY, Vivyip Artroom, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 2009 SAFARI, Ruang MES 56, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Group Exhibition

- 2012 Saturations: Selection of Indonesian Contemporary Photography Post-2000s, Element Art Space, Singapore
40 x 40, Dia-Lo-Gue Art Space, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 2011 MONEY CULTURE, Garis Art Space, Jakarta, Indonesia
BEASTLY, Sailhara, Jakarta, Indonesia
PMR CUBE, Sampoerna Strategic Building, Jakarta, Indonesia
APOGEE- A Compilation of Solitude, POLISTAR, Tophane/ Istanbul, Turkey
Ruang Mes56: Contemporary Photography from Indonesia, CCP Melbourne, Australia
Beyond Photography, Ciputra Marketing Gallery Kuningan Jakarta, Indonesia
Asian Photography Section, Bazaar Art Festival Ritz Carlton Hotel Jakarta, Indonesia
NEW POP NEW WORLD, Element Art Space, Singapore
We Are Now Open, Garis Art Space, Jakarta, Indonesia
BEASTLY, Cemeti Art House Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Month Of Photography Tokyo, Ricoh Ring Cube Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
The Howler Terror Club Interstellar Artist, The Goods Dept., Jakarta, Indonesia
FOTOGRAFICA BOGOTÁ 2011, Galeria Christopher Paschall S.XXI, Bogota, Colombia
1001 Doors Re-interpreting Traditions, Ciputra Marketing Mental Archive, Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Digit (all), Umah Seni, Jakarta, Indonesia
The 2nd Jakarta International Photo Summit, Galeri Nasional, Jakarta, Indonesia
All (butt) Paper, Dia.Lo.Gue, Jakarta, Indonesia
Galeri Kuningan, Jakarta, Indonesia
Daegu Photo Biennale 2010, Daegu Culture and Arts Center, Daegu, South Korea
Shopping, Nadi Gallery JAD, Jakarta, Indonesia

- 10th Anniversary One Gallery, One Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia
The Loss of the Real, Selsar Sunaryo, Bandung, Indonesia
Room is Mine, Edwin Gallery JAD Jakarta, Indonesia
Mendamba Tubuh [photography], Goethe Haus, Jakarta, Indonesia
Crash Project: Image Factory [photography], SIGlarts, Jakarta, Indonesia
Cut 10 New Photography from Southeast Asia PARALLEL UNIVERSE, Valentine Willie Fine Art Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Manila, Jogjakarta
Look! See? – Indonesian Contemporary Photography Exhibition, Nadi Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 2009 URBANTOPIA – Contemporary Photo Exhibition, North Art Space, Ancol, Jakarta, Indonesia
CUT 09 FIGURE – New Photography from Southeast Asia, Valentine Willie Fine Art Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Manila
- 2008 APPAF International Photo Festival, Estremoz, Portugal
Move Heaven N Layer [photography], Oktagon Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia
Indonesia Art Award – [photography], Galeri Nasional, Jakarta, Indonesia
IN-TER-MIS-SION : A Pause or Break [drawing & photography], PVJ, Bandung, Indonesia
- 2007 JPG Fashion Photography – [photography], Space Gallery, San Francisco, USA
- 2004 It's All About...[Drawing], STDi, Bandung, Indonesia
Miceun Runtah Dina Otak [drawing], Dago Street, Bandung, Indonesia
Aku Cinta Kamu Dulu Baru Aku [drawing], Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI), Bandung, Indonesia
- 2003 Selera Kita Rasa Idaman [drawing], Gedung YPK, Bandung, Indonesia
- 2001 Manusia Datas Kertas [drawing], STDi, Bandung, Indonesia

Award

- 2008 Nominee Indonesia Art Award, Galeri Nasional Jakarta, Indonesia

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art room

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All artworks by Agan Harahap are available in these following mediums:

1. C-print on Aluminum Dibond, Edition of 2
2. C-Print on Positive Film, Neon Box Installation, Unique Edition

Dimension of works are given in centimeters, height x width

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