



A Study of Pan-Sensualism as a Cross-Cultural Form: An Artwork by Jim Supangkat; *Ken Dedes* (1975)

Aprilia Ariesty Wibowo*, Kiki Rizky Soetisna Putri & Irma Damajanti

Faculty of Visual Art and Design, Institute of Technology Bandung,
Jalan Ganesa No. 10 Bandung 40132, Indonesia

*Email: apriliariesty9494@gmail.com

Abstract. This study examined the use of the term ‘Pan-Sensualism’ in the discourse on contemporary Indonesian new art and how this manifested itself in artworks created at the beginning of the Indonesian New Order era (1966-1998). Jim Supangkat was one of the artists and initiators in forming the artist group *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia* (Indonesian New Art Movement), which then organized the first *Seni Rupa Baru 75* exhibition in 1975. Jim Supangkat presented six installation works with different narratives, but *Ken Dedes* was the only one that presented the dialectic of traditional and modern culture. The Prajnaparamita, or Ken Dedes statue is presented with a drawing of the body of a woman wearing jeans with the buttons open. In looking at the formal, social-historical, cultural, feministic, and other elements in the work of Ken Dedes (1975-1996), we used the iconographic research method. This method helps to see several aspects of Supangkat’s visual works related to the aesthetic paradigm of Pan-Sensualism and the intersection of two cultural elements, i.e., high and low art, which may be distinguished based on social class appreciation.

Keywords: *crosss-cultural; GSRBI; Jim Supangkat; Ken Dedes; Pan-Sensualism.*

1 Introduction

Pan-Sensualism is a term that emerged in Yustiono’s dissertation [1] due to his efforts to read trends in the work of art students in Bandung and Yogyakarta. The dissertation discusses the interpretation of Ahmad Sadali’s work by looking at the context of the development of modernity in Indonesian fine arts and the context of spirituality in Ahmad Sadali’s work with a hermeneutic approach (Figure 1). Yustiono saw a distinctive trend where artists who were members of *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia* (GSRBI) no longer put elements of spirituality in their works.

In an interview entitled “Wave of War between Tauhid Spiritualism and Pansensualism” in [2], Yustiono explained that Pan-Sensualism was a major international current – a movement that originated from the latest modern art in the West that had developed since the 1950s. Yustiono believed this current was

probably sparked during the Pop Art period, which developed greatly around 1954 and spread worldwide, giving rise to diverse characteristics

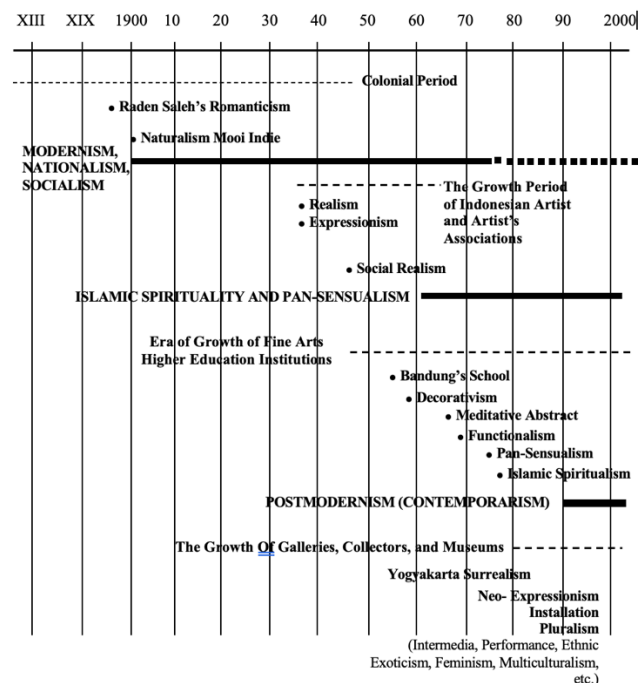


Figure 1 Periodization of Indonesian modern art in the context of aesthetic, cultural and social modernity, adapted from Yustiono [1].

In Ridzky's thesis [3], it is stated that the term 'Pan-Sensualism' was introduced to classify and read the aesthetic tendencies carried out by artists who were members of *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia* (GSRBI) in the 1970s. This movement was considered to have different artistic tendencies, which can be seen from a statement made by Sanento Yuliman in the introduction to the *Seni Rupa Baru 75* exhibition, which stated that there were tendencies that were different from the previous generation. This was reinforced by the statement '*Lima Jurus Gebrakan Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia*' [4], which prioritized the spirit of newness in art without any limitations.

Student activists from Bandung and Yogyakarta initiated GSRBI in August 1974, eight months after the *Desember Hitam* protes event. This movement then held an exhibition entitled *Seni Rupa Baru 75* at Taman Ismail Marzuki, Central Jakarta, in 1975. Eleven artists took part in the exhibition, i.e., Anyool Subroto, Bachtiar Zainoel, Pandu Sudewo, Nanik Mirna, Muryoto Hartoyo, Harsono, Munni Ardhi, Hardi, Ris Purnama, Siti Adyati and Jim Supangkat.

In this paper, we will look at the work of one of the exponents of the exhibition, namely the work *Ken Dedes* by Jim Supangkat, created in 1975 and re-created in 1996. This work was one of the few exhibited artworks with a dialectic between traditional and modern cultural elements. Apart from that, Muryoto Hartoyo's work showed batik cloth combined with several pieces of wood. In these two works, elements from Indonesian traditional culture are visible, but the work *Ken Dedes* shows modern culture with elements of sensuality through the use of unbuttoned jeans and exposed breasts.

In studying the work *Ken Dedes*, the author collected several literary sources, including journals, books, dissertations, and theses related to study topics such as Pan-Sensualism, explanations of the Prajnaparamita statue, popular culture, cross-cultural studies, and other relevant aesthetic studies.

The thesis written by Ridzky [3] is a fairly comprehensive source of literature regarding Pan-Sensualism. However, this thesis focuses solely on the relationship between the Pan-Sensualism theory and the GSRBI movement. Yustiono's dissertation [1] is a reference that discusses the theory of Pan-Sensualism. In this dissertation, Yustiono looks at aesthetic phenomena in modern art in Indonesia. This helps explain the theory and study of Pan-Sensualism, which had previously been introduced by Takashina [5].

The limited discussion in the literature regarding the work *Ken Dedes* prompted the author to interview Jim Supangkat on August 16, 2023, at his residence. From this interview, it is hoped that we will get an explanation regarding the concept and creation process of the work *Ken Dedes*.

In this paper, the following three research questions are discussed:

- What is Pan-Sensualism in Indonesian modern art?
- How did Jim Supangkat represent elements of Pan-Sensualism in his work entitled *Ken Dedes*?
- What is the cross-cultural position in the work *Ken Dedes* within the discourse of Pan-Sensualism theory introduced by Yustiono?

2 Pan-Sensualism and *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia*

Fine art in the third world generally has an orientation towards developments in Western art. Pop Art is an art style that has greatly influenced the development of art in the Third World, among which Indonesia. Tilman Osterwold explains that Pop Art responded to depersonalization in mass society with an impersonal style and images with the same objectivity. In his book entitled *Pop Art*, Osterwold touches on portraits and mass culture as part of the Pop Art style [6].

Pan-Sensualism is a term introduced by Yustiono in his dissertation, a term taken from Takashina's article [5]. This Takashina defines pan-sensualism as things that provide a sensation to the senses beyond sight. Objects that pamper the eyes, touch, and other senses of the human body.

Yustiono and Takashina have intersecting meanings of Pan-Sensualism. Pan-Sensualism was introduced by Yustiono [1]. In [2], Yustiono assumes that Pan-Sensualism is a major current that is international. Everything points to the Pop Art period starting in 1954, which spread worldwide since then. The characteristic of this wave is that it utilizes icons or symbols or realities of popular culture in the West, represented by comics, movie stars, hamburgers, or symbols of Western materialistic lifestyles that spread worldwide, not only in America and Europe but also in Asia, Africa, Australia, and Latin America.

Takashina explains several artistic characteristics in works included in the Pan-Sensualism discourse, including works of art that are considered to have novelty in responding to the human senses. Takashina alludes to Pop Art as an example of this, creating a realm from an ordinary or everyday perspective. He also mentions happening art and body painting as other example of Pan-Sensualism [5]. Yustiono also states that symbols of Western materialistic lifestyles and characteristics influenced Pan-Sensualism, which thus overlaps with Takashina's description.

Pop Art has strongly influenced the development of modern art. As previously explained, Pop Art is related to mass culture and the production of goods and portraits. This is in line with Yustiono's opinion regarding Western art styles going global; this does not rule out the possibility of Indonesia as a Third World country being influenced by this art style. Some of the keywords in Pan-Sensualism are Pop Art, Western art movement, and the latest modern art form. In line with Takashina's statement, Pan-Sensualism is oriented toward objects and material products of mass culture, which includes installation art styles.

Western fine art styles dominate the works of GSRBI. This was motivated by its members consciously or unconsciously experiencing Western influences in formal and non-formal aspects of art and information. In an interview, Jim Supangkat, one of the founding members of GSRBI, explained that access to imported literature was very important for him [7]. He explained that he had family living abroad who sent reading materials and he himself liked to look for the latest literature from abroad at the Cikapundung market in Bandung. Not only Supangkat, but also students from ASRI Yogyakarta (now ISI) absorbed information and knowledge about foreign art, such as art history, art criticism, and aesthetics at the end of the 1960s.

3 *Ken Dedes* (1975-1996) by Jim Supangkat

The *Seni Rupa Baru 75* exhibition had a large variety of works in terms of the choice of materials, narratives, and forms of objects in the works. Some artists still used canvas and oil paint, while others used ready-made items. Bachtiar Zainoel used an aluminum plate, FX Harsono used cloth and plastic flowers and a plastic gun, Muryoto Hartoyo used batik cloth and canvas, and Jim Supangkat used resin, wood, iron, and watches in several of his works. Of all the works exhibited at *Seni Rupa Baru 75*, Jim Supangkat's work *Ken Dedes* attracted criticism from art observers or critics such as Sudarmadji and Kusnadi, who debated the aesthetic and cultural values in the work.

The work *Ken Dedes* was present along with other works by Jim Supangkat, including *Kamar Seorang Ibu dengan Anaknya*, *Peristiwa Kelahiran*, *Rukiah*, *Bunga Tembaga dalam Pagar*, and one work that was untitled, which was made of iron, watches, saws and padlocks, which formed objects that resembled crosses. Among these six works, the work *Ken Dedes* was the only work that had a sensual and critical form in the Indonesian cultural landscape, which came from the presence of the Prajnaparamita statue, which was elaborated with the drawing of a female body wearing unbuttoned jeans (Figure 2). The elements of sensuality and aesthetics will be discussed below from the perspective of Pan-Sensualism.

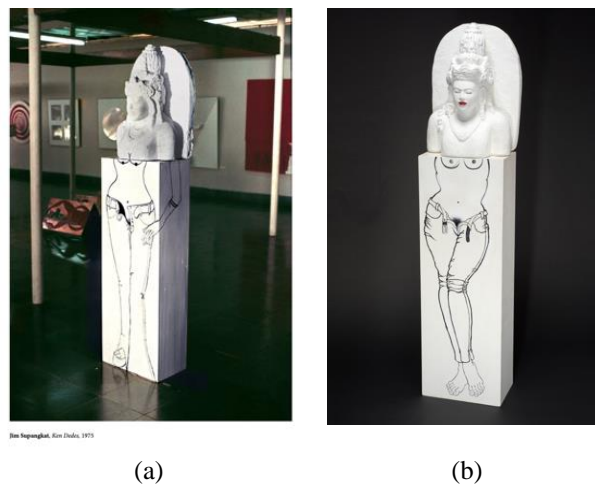


Figure 2 *Ken Dedes* (a) 1975 [8] and (b) 1996 (reproduction) [9].

In dissecting the visuals of the work *Ken Dedes* (1975-1996), a method is required to interpret its elements. The iconography method is a method that focuses on the meaning behind a work of art. Iconography examines works of art through formal analysis, social history, feminist approaches, and others [10].

This method helps examine the work of *Ken Dedes*, which can be studied formally, and its relationship to the social background. According to Panofsky, there are three stages: pre-iconographic description, iconographic analysis, and iconological interpretation.

In the pre-iconography description stage, the work is identified, and the appearance of the work is described based on visual characteristics such as line configuration, color, shape, technique, and materials used. The second stage in the iconographic method is the iconographic analysis stage. Panofsky explained that the iconographic analysis stage is related to images, stories, and allusions to events obtained through practical experience. The third stage, namely iconological interpretation, aims to provide a subtle or fundamental intrinsic or symbolic meaning to the subject of the work of art in order to be able to analyze the philosophical principles of works of art in a particular era.



Jim Supangkat, *Ken Dedes*, 1975

Figure 3 Jim Supangkat, *Ken Dedes*, 1975. Plaster, wood, marker, and paint. Dimensions 41.5 x 125.5 x 26 cm [8].

Ken Dedes (1975-1996) is a three-dimensional work with two components arranged vertically. The work *Ken Dedes* was re-created in 1996; both works were almost the same. *Ken Dedes* from 1975 is a work that consists of a statue of Prajnaparamita, only half of which is visible. Below it is a white pedestal with black marker markings, depicting a half-naked woman wearing cut bray jeans with open buttons and high sandals on the left foot that are only partly visible. The woman's left hand leans on her left upper thigh (Figure 3).

The second work, *Ken Dedes* (1996), reproduces the first. This second *Ken Dedes* work again presents the statue of Prajnaparamita, now with red lips, and a white pedestal with the body of a half-naked woman wearing tight jeans with open buttons. Then, there is a pair of bare feet (Figure 4).



Figure 4 Jim Supangkat, *Ken Dedes*, 1996. Plaster, wood, marker, and paint. Dimensions 186.5 x 43.5 x 27 cm [9].

Jim Supangkat was one of the artists responsible for initiating the *Seni Rupa Baru 75* exhibition. Jim Supangkat, whose full name is Jim Abiyasa Supangkat Silaen, is currently known as an artist, journalist, and art critic whose writings have been published in various mass media and who has written several art books.

Ken Dedes combines two symbols, namely a symbol of tradition and a symbol of popular culture. The symbols can be seen at the top and bottom of the work respectively. Jim Supangkat in an interview explained that *Ken Dedes* was created twice with different background needs. The first work was created for the *Seni Rupa Baru 75* exhibition, and the second work was for the *Modernity and Beyond* exhibition held at the Singapore Art Museum, curated by T.K. Sabapathy in 1996. Although created in different periods, these works use the same materials, i.e., plaster, wood, marker, and paint. At the plastering stage, Supangkat made a copy of an existing Prajnaparamita statue, which was then elaborated with a base object with a woman's figure drawn on its surface (Figure 5).

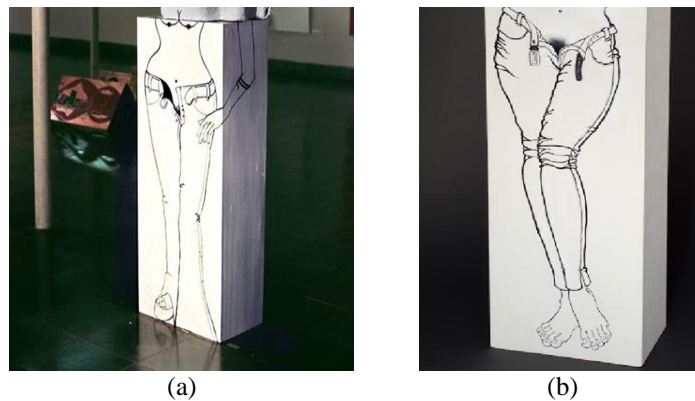


Figure 5 Unbutton jeans on *Ken Dedes* (a) 1975 [8] and (b) 1998 [9].

In the book [11], Benjamin touches on works of art that are reproduced. Benjamin stated that the principles of works of art are highly reproducible and that new works can represent something new. In this case, Supangkat reproduced a Prajnaparamita statue with a mold made by Jim Supangkat himself, which he then filled with plaster. This can be categorized as a kind of art appropriation. Appropriation refers to borrowing or reusing existing elements in a new work. Jim Supangkat created this work by bringing a new narrative to the Prajnaparamita statue, which was elaborated with a white pedestal depicting a woman wearing unbuttoned jeans.

The article [12] gives a description of Ken Dedes from the perspective of Archaeological Heritage Conservation Center of East Java Province. Ken Dedes was a figure who represented physical perfection. This statement was reinforced by the historian Singasari, who stated that the beauty of Ken Dedes was also reflected in her personality. Ken Dedes was a perfect ascetic who held the title of *Prajnaparamita* (wise woman with perfect behavior) and was likened to Stri Nareswari, who gave birth to the rulers of the Land of Java. Ken Dedes possessed all virtues and could not lose them because she had mastered the science of *Karma Amamadani* (Figure 6).

Former Indonesian president Soekarno was a figure who loved fine art, but he had no interest in Western popular music. The *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat* (LEKRA) movement, which had ties to the Communist Party, also represented an anti-Western spirit. In the book [13], Vickers says that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a strange combination of military domination of all aspects of society and a liberalized youth culture. Students who were members of the anti-Soekarno group were also members of the International Cultural Youth. Illegal drugs, gangster groups, and rock music were widespread in several regions of Indonesia, especially big cities.



Figure 6 Prajnaparamita statue or *Ken Dedes* [14].

This situation had followed the rise of the New Order in Indonesia, which Supangkat had witnessed when he was still in high school. For him, it was surprising development because the 1960s and the early 1970s were a closed era, and then Indonesia suddenly opened up. Thus, he represented the New Order by unbuttoned jeans, exposing some public hair. The period when the *Pameran Seni Rupa Baru 75* exhibition took place was horrendous in the eyes of Supangkat. Very rigid regulations were imposed while, traditionally, Indonesian society accepted personal freedom in almost all aspects of life.

In the work *Ken Dedes*, Supangkat drew a half-naked woman wearing cut bray trousers (1975) and tight jeans (1996) using a black marker. In the article [15], Downey stated that jeans or denim had been around since the 17th century, first produced in Lancashire, North West England, and were popularized by Levi Strauss with the trademark Levi Strauss & Co from 1873 in the United States. The same article also mentions a surge in sales in several European and Asian regions in the late 1960s.

Another article written by Putri and Moordiaty [16], explains that jeans were an androgynous fashion product that was seen as indispensable in the New Order era. The term ‘androgynous’ is a fashion term that refers to a combination of femininity and masculinity. The article also mentions that androgynous fashion developed in Indonesia along with the opening up to the West during the New Order era, namely around the late 1960s and the early 1970s.

Jeans in this discussion are in line with the concept of popular culture, or what is usually called mass culture. According to the book [17], popular culture

represents conditions in contemporary Indonesian society that are part of everyday life. The word 'popular' itself is a word that refers to 'appreciated by most people'. Historically, this word referred to low aesthetic standards or bad taste. However, popular culture must be connected to discussions of mass culture. Mass culture is related to industry and the common people. Mass culture and popular culture are two related phenomena, where popular products create trends that increase market demand so that certain companies have to provide these goods in large quantities (mass).

Indonesian modern art also experienced changes and developments during the New Order era. GSRBI had the goal of developing Indonesian art. Jim Supangkat was one of the artists who was critical and wanted to develop Indonesian modern art, especially by breaking boundaries that this group considered outdated.

The work *Ken Dedes*, created in 1975 and then re-created in 1996, has a meaning related to the social context and emotional state of Jim Supangkat. In an interview conducted by the author, Supangkat explained he was aware of the influence of foreign literature on art that Supangkat read while studying. The literature was published in foreign journals and magazines he had received from family and purchased from the Cikapundung flea market. The influence of Western knowledge was the background to the creation of Jim Supangkat's work during college.

The cross-cultural concept in the work *Ken Dedes* shows the influence of two types of art. Borrowing Yuliman's terminology, the *Dua Seni Rupa* in question are high and low art, categorized based on people's living standards and social conditions [18]. High art includes the fine arts appreciated by people with high economic status and a higher educational background. The fine arts includes paintings and sculptures made by people educated in art school. Interior design and graphic design are popular art forms that fulfill needs in society. In the work *Ken Dedes*, Supangkat duplicates the Prajnaparamita statue using plaster. Supangkat's ability to reproduce the Prajnaparamita statue came from higher education and information in the literature that he had read. This ability reflects progress in thinking, which is an aspect of high art.

Meanwhile, low art is art that comes from artists who have a lower standard of living. This lower-level art comes from non-academic circles and small areas in independent communities who make art in the form of glass paintings, 'street paintings', rickshaw paintings, and 'traditional' textiles. Low art is generally made with outdated tools and equipment, working methods, uneducated labor, and low-quality materials with few alternatives available. In the context of the work *Ken Dedes*, Supangkat presents a wooden pedestal, painted white all over,

on which he drew the shape of a woman's body using a black marker. This simple method is often found in low art, where the materials used are inexpensive and easy to find. The visuals presented on this pedestal are quite simple, as seen in the absence of lines that indicate darkness and light.

4 Conclusion

Both versions of the work *Ken Dedes*, created in 1975 and 1996 respectively, show signs of the influence of global developments in larger societal conditions, such as capitalist production patterns. This can be seen in the unbuttoned jeans. The opening of the trousers is a form of criticism from Jim Supangkat regarding the era in which this work was created, namely the New Order era in Indonesia. This era was characterized by openness of Indonesian society in several aspects, such as social, political, and cultural. The Indonesian government allowed people to be exposed to foreign products such as music, illegal drugs, foreign magazines, films, and fashion.

In the creation process, the work *Ken Dedes* is a work that combined high and low art. *Dua Seni Rupa*, originating from two different cultural backgrounds, create a cultural crossover in the work *Ken Dedes*. The high culture in question comes from the higher economic class, which contrast with the low culture of the lower and middle class.

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