



Trisno Sumardjo (front row, second from right) in his SIM days, as painted in 1947 by Sudjojono together with other SIM members and friends. Among the painters portrayed are: Kartono (front row, left); Basuki Resobowo (front row, second from left); Sudarso (second row, second from left); Sudibio (top row, third from right); Yudhokusumo (top row, second from left). The inscription at the top of the painting reads: "The will of the times carries us to one house, one place, one sky, one revolution. This revolution is the Indonesian revolution." Painting from the collection of Ir. Sukarno. Photo: Claire Holt, 1956.

IN MEMORIAM: TRISNO SUMARDJO

(December 6, 1916 - April 21, 1969)

Claire Holt

When with great sadness one celebrates the memory of a friend who has suddenly disappeared forever, it is somehow consoling to know that one has managed, knowingly, to say goodbye. Thus, when I last saw Trisno Sumardjo in Djakarta in March of this year, we both knew at parting that we would not meet again. He passed away a month later.

In many ways the circumstances were somewhat dream-like. The setting was Djakarta's new Art Center--a modern complex of handsome structures comprising several theaters, an exhibition hall, a future Academy of the Arts, a fine dance studio and several other studios for practicing artists, all miraculously erected by Djakarta's dynamic Governor, Ali Sadikin, between July and November 1968. And here was Trisno Sumardjo, apparently at the height of his career, but physically a ghost of his former self, hollow-eyed, pale, emaciated--evidently a very sick man--with a wan smile, walking with me towards his home on the grounds of the Center which was the realization of a long-cherished dream of Djakarta's leading artists and intellectuals, not least his own.

Trisno was now Chairman of the twenty-member Arts Council of the City of Djakarta, composed of writers, painters, musicians, dramatists and producers, poets and journalists, which guided the Art Center's activities. These included the organization of performances, not least in the 2,000-seat open air theater, of exhibitions, of musical events, of training courses for dancers, and a variety of other cultural enterprises. Comfortably installed with his family in a pleasant, modern two-story unit on one side of the main complex with its attractive structures, plazas and paved paths, he could relish at last, after years of struggle, frustrations and relative poverty, full recognition of his vital function and place in society, but only for a brief, all too brief period of time.

At one point during my visit he invited me to see a film. The film was about Trisno Sumardjo, the painter. In a series of sensitively photographed scenes, one saw him at work on a canvas, or contemplating a landscape (he painted mainly landscapes), with close-ups of either the artist himself or of some detail of his paintings, or of his hand guiding the brush. A commentator's voice spoke of the man and his works.

Throughout my friendship with Trisno, since 1955, I knew him as an earnest, thoughtful, intense yet modest man not given to small-talk and generally rather reticent. His obvious eagerness to have me see the film struck me at first as somehow out of character. But, looking at him later, involuntarily the thought came: Is this film an epitaph to himself? And does he want to be remembered mainly as a painter?

Though he had taken up painting in 1946, when he had joined the artists' association SIM (*Seniman Indonesia Muda*), then in Solo, and had practiced it throughout his life, Trisno Sumardjo's gifts lay also, and perhaps more so, in the literary field. Moreover, he could not depend on his paintings for making a living. (As he expressed it laconically--"*melukis setahun untuk hidup setengah bulan*," paint half a year to live half a month.) In this respect the fears of his father, who was a school teacher in Surabaya, and who was dismayed learning that his son took up painting because he would "never get a pension," were more than justified. Trisno's literary activities were a better source of income. He wrote short stories, poems, essays, plays, art criticism, and worked prodigiously at translations. The latter include at least nine plays by Shakespeare, and works by Boris Pasternak, La Fontaine, and Edgar Allan Poe.

On the literary scene Trisno Sumardjo was a senior member of the "Generation of 1945" (*Angkatan 1945*). His poetry is best represented in the collection entitled *Silhuet* (*Silhouette*). Of the many short stories he wrote, several collections appeared; such as *Rumah Raja* (*The Great House*), *Daun Kering* (*Dry Leaves*), and *Wadjah-wadjah Jang Berubah* (*Changing Faces*). One of his stories, "Narcissus," was included in translation in a German anthology entitled *Kurz erzählt: Die schönsten Geschichten der Weltliteratur* (1949).

Apart from writing himself, he was heavily engaged in editorial work. At one time editor of the journal *Seni* (*Art*) published by SIM, and later of *Seniman* (*The Artist*), he became a prominent member of the secretariat and editorial board of the Council on National Culture (*Badan Musjawarat Kebudayaan Nasional*, or BMKN) founded in 1952. This organization published the journal *Indonesia*, a leading cultural periodical. During the second decade of the Sukarno regime, the BMKN fought a losing battle with the increasingly influential, communist-sponsored People's Cultural Institute (*Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat*, or LEKRA) and gradually faded away. In 1964, Trisno Sumardjo was a co-signer of the famous "Cultural Manifesto" which brought down the wrath of the government upon the heads of a number of outstanding writers and artists.

A quality Trisno probably prized most was honesty. His motto (cited by A. Teeuw in his "Modern Indonesian Literature"), "*Seni buah kedjudjuran*" (art is the fruit of integrity), seems to imply that at the root of all good art must lie the artist's

absolute honesty. While frankly admitting that he did not appreciate, or rather did not understand, abstract art, Trisno could admire the works of such painters as A. Sadali (of the Bandung School) whose delicate, semi-abstract compositions of the 'fifties--so different from his own (a mixture of naturalism and impressionism)--appeared to him as very beautiful "even though their beauty derives from afar," as he put it.

In his writings, Trisno Sumardjo tried to encourage contemporary artists to become creative exponents of a new Indonesia. And in one of his articles (published in the *Weekly Star*, No. 530, February 25, 1956), he warned his readers not to accept uncritically what foreign scholars and observers were writing about Indonesia, its history and culture. Insufficient independent study of their own country and people, he thought, was the reason for the tendency of Indonesians to accept and repeat statements published about them abroad instead of subjecting them to critical scrutiny.

No doubt Trisno Sumardjo had his own severe critics at home. To some of his contemporaries, especially the younger ones, he may have appeared as too conservative, puritanical, insufficiently daring in his own creative expressions, oscillating as he was between the visual and verbal modes. But as a man who had worked indefatigably towards the enrichment of his country's cultural life, he will remain a figure not easily forgotten.

Selected Works

Collections:

- 1952 Katahati dan Perbuatan (Conscience and Deeds), collection of five stories, two short plays and of poems.
- 1953 Tjita Teruna (Youthful Ideals), a play in verse.
- 1957 Rumah Raja (The Great House), a collection of stories.
- 1962 Daun Kering (Dry Leaves), a collection of nine stories written between 1951 and 1958.
- 1966(?) Silhueta (Silhouette), a collection of poems.
- 1968 Wadjah-wadjah jang Berubah (Changing Faces), a collection of short stories.

Some articles and stories:

- 1948 Narzissus, a short story.

- 1951 Penghidupan Seniman (The Life of an Artist), Zenith, 1.1, pp. 3-14.
- 1954 Tiga Manusia (Three Human Beings), a short story, Zenith, 4.1, pp. 15-22.
- 1956 "The Tendencies in Indonesian Art," illustrated article, "Perspective of Indonesia," Atlantic Monthly Supplement, 197 (June 1956), pp. 127-36.
- 1957 Penjelenggaraan Kesenian Semasarakat (The Cultivation of National Art), Indonesia, VIII, No. 9-10 (September-October 1957), pp. 386-396.
- 1960 Kuanda Ibu (Mother's Bier), a short story.
- 1963 Penghuni Pohon (The Tree Spirit), a short story.

Translations:

Shakespeare Plays:

- 1950 Hamlet (Hamlet, Pangeran Denmark).
- 1950 The Merchant of Venice (Saudagar Venezia).
- 1952 As You Like It (Manasuka).
- 1952 The Tempest (Prahara).
- 1952 Macbeth (Macbeth).
- 1953 A Midsummernight's Dream (Impian ditengah Musim).
- 1955 Romeo and Juliet (Romeo dan Julia).
- Anthony and Cleopatra - not published.
- King Lear - not published.

Other:

- 1959 Jean de la Fontaine, Fables (Dongeng Perumpamaan).
- 1960 Boris Pasternak, Dr. Zhivago.
- 1969 Edgar Allan Poe, (Death and Mystery) (Maut dan Misteri), probably a collection of Poe's "death tales," exact original title is not known.