

Modern Painting in North Sumatera

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Abstract. Modern painting in North Sumatra has existed since Indonesia's independence in 1945. Its existence and development are supported by the existence of a painters' association. Art education institutions, art writers, mass media, *galleries*, *art shops*, and art enthusiast societies. Painting of the realist, naturalist, surrealist, impressionist, decorative, contemporary, and-abstract schools of painting are the most dominant schools of painting. The painters are mostly self-taught, others have studied at art colleges, and alumni of fine arts education. Exhibitions of paintings are organized in groups or individuals. The existence and development of modern painting in North Sumatra is also part of the development of modern painting in Indonesia.

Keywords: Art, Painting, Modern, North, Sumatera

1 Introduction

Modern painting in North Sumatra can be traced to its existence from 1945. In that year a number of painters in Medan founded a painter's association called the Indonesian Fine Arts Force (abbreviated as ASRI 45). The founders of the association were David Yusuf, Tino Sidin, Nasyah Jamin, Hasan Siregar, Ismail Daulay, R.M Aulia, and a number of other painters¹. The society is actively exhibiting. In 1950 ASRI 45 exhibited with painters from Java, Affandi and Kusnadi at the Grand Hotel Medan. In 1967 an association of artists was established called Simpaian Artis Rupa Indonesia (abbreviated as SIMPASSRI). Since the establishment of SIMPASSRI, painters gathered in ASRI 45 have collaborated with each other to organize painting exhibitions. In 1988 the painter Muhammad Yatim Mustofa after 6 years of studying painting at the Pejeng Bali studio, he founded the Rowo studio. This studio where a number of young painters learned to improve the quality of their paintings and then became professional painters.

The establishment of SIMPASSRI is different from the establishment of other painters' associations. Painters' societies are usually founded solely for the benefit of painters. The founders and administrators among themselves The establishment of SIMPASSRI was initiated

¹ Eko Prawoto, Amran., *Seni Lukis Medan*, Vol.2 No. 12, Medan: Badan Warisan Sumatera, 2009.

by the regional rulers of that time. In its management structure there are also a number of government and military officials. Before 1965 when the communist party was very strong, there were a number of painters in this area who belonged to LEKRA, an art institution affiliated with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). The party staged an uprising and power struggle on 30 September 1965 but failed. Because of the coup, the PKI was disbanded and declared a banned party. The political background and ideology that could influence the artists was behind the establishment of SIMPASSRI by the regional rulers so that the artists were under government control.

In 1967 Lt. Gen. A.J. Mokoginta (Commander of the Inter-Regional Defense Command) Pangkohanda Sumatra-Kalbar initiated the establishment of an artist association called Simpaian Artis Seni Rupa Indonesia (abbreviated as SIMPASSRI)². The management structure of the period 1967-1969 consisted of artists, people from the government and the military. The administrator of the military is Lieutenant Colonel Wahid Lubis (Officer of the KOANDA Fine Arts Project) as an advisor. The management of the government is M. Alwy Umry (head of P & K North Sumatra representative), A Halim (head of inspection of the North Sumatra cultural area), Ir. Zulkifli Katib as chairman. As for Ir. Zulkifli Katib, Dr. dzulham, Arif Husin Siregar, Heru Wiryono served in the special session of the hoop. Commissioners Arif Husin Siregar, M Saleh, Mulya Munthe. Treasurer Machzum Siregar, sukaryono cash holder.

The SIMPASSRI building is located on Jl. Letjen Suprpto interchange of Lotus Street No. 1 Medan. This building was inaugurated by the Lt. Gen. Poniman (pangwilham official) on December 23, 1975. SIMPASSRI brings together artists from the fields of painting, sculpture, photography, and architecture. At the beginning of the establishment of this association consisted of 39 painters, 9 sculptors, 29 photographers, 17 architects. Head of architecture Ir . Aminuddin, head of photography Said Ma'as, head of sculpture/ sculpture Heru Wiryono, head of painting Abdul Wahid, and head of logistics Ir. Noormansyah (Muhammad TWH: Analisa 2003).

In 1970 a reorganization was held and reconstitution of the new management of SIMPASSRI. A new board was elected with the following formation. Chairman M. Yusuf Damiri B.A.E., secretary I Ridjojo, secretary II Drs. Oloan Situmorang. Treasurer M. Hasan Siregar, head of architecture Ir . Aminuddin, head of painting Arfi Rachmat, head of sculpture Heru Wiryono, head of photography Rusli Lubis.

Various activities are organized by SIMPASSRI. A number of officials from governors to ministers paid attention to SIMPASSRI's activities. In 1989 the 22nd anniversary of SIMPASSRI exhibition in the SIMPASSRI building, an exhibition with painters and craftsmen. The exhibition was witnessed by the coordinating minister of economic affairs Radius Prawiro and the mayor of Medan H.AS Rangkuti. The Akbar SIMPASSRI 93 exhibition (November 24, 1993) was opened by the governor of North Sumatra Raja Inal Siregar³.

The activities held include a number of exhibitions in the local area and outside the area. The inclusion of a number of painters for exhibitions in Java in various exhibition *events*. Sending a number of painters for comparative studies in art activity centers in Java such as Jakarta, Bandung, and Yogyakarta. The activities invited a number of artists from Java to exhibit and discuss. A number of prominent artists such as Affandi, Fajar Sidik, Koesnadi, and others are

² M.Adhi, Simpassri Dan Gedungnya Perlu Dihidupkan Dan Ditata Kembali, Analisa, Minggu, 16 Maret 2008.

³ Muhammad THW, Simpassri Gemilang Datang, Gemilang Menghilang, Analisa Minggu 19 Oktober 2003

recorded to have exhibited and filled discussion events at this association. In 1997 Heru Wiryono and friends when they became the chairman of SIMPASSRI, initiated the awarding of *awards* for artists by forming the *Simpasri Award Organizing Institution*, (abbreviated as LIPSA) but this good idea has never been implemented until now.

The involvement of the military and the government continued during the tenure of the artists' association in later periods. Until the ideological turmoil is no longer a threat, in the management structure of the association, it still involves the military and the government. But the association tends to be abandoned and ignored by both the government and the military. Since 2000 SIMPASSRI has become an association of artists who live unwillingly to die. There are no more activities sponsored by the government or the military.

The exhibition organized by the artists began to be empty of visitors. The sending of painters to exhibit in national exhibitions in Java was never done again. The activity of inviting artist figures no longer exists, comparative studies of artists also never exist again. The condition of the SIMPASSRI building began to be damaged even though it had been renovated several times⁴.

The activities of the association are receding. Since its establishment until now SIMPASSRI has gone through several leadership changes. Since it was first held (1967) by Ir. Zulkifli Katib then continued successively by M. Yusuf Damiri, Ir. Nurmansyah (during the leadership of Ir. Nurmansyah 1987-1989 the operational activities of this artist association were funded by the North Sumatra APBD), Heru Wiryono, Utoyo Hadi, Handono Hadi, Budi Siagian, Fuad Erdansyah, and finally Nasrudin (2016 - 2018), starting in 2018 - 2022 SIMPASSRI is run by the *Simpasri Foundation* chaired by Fuad Erdansah⁵.

Now (2022) SIMPASSRI is 55 years old. The change of management since its establishment has undergone several changes. Along with the times, when ideological conflicts were no longer a threat to the state, neither the government nor the military side reduced their involvement in this artist association. The attention of the government is getting less and less and less attractive to painters. Painters tended to work independently and unorganizedly adjusting to the demands and development of the times.

On the other hand, there is *Sanggar Rowo* which also plays an important role in maintaining the existence and development of modern painting in this area. *Sanggar Rowo* was founded by PELukis Muhammad Yatim Mustofa. The painter was born in Medan in 1957⁶. Orphans learned to paint informally on painters Yandi Ario and Dullah. In 1978 Yatim went to Bali to study at the painter Dullah, the manager of *sanggar Pejeng*, as well as the painter of the presidential palace of the Republic of Indonesia. About 6 years Orphan studied at the painter. After returning from Bali, in 1988 Yatim established *Sanggar Rowo* in Tanjung Morawa Deli Serdang.

A number of young painters studied in this studio. They became professional painters. The students of *Sanggar Rowo* include Bambang Triyogo, Didi Prihadi, Alwan Sanrio, Hardiman Wisesa, Farah, Cecep Priyono, Wan Saad, Mulyadi, Ary Darma, Herdy An, Adril Husni, Dai Lubis, Budiarni, Iwan Vero, Saliman, Eko Cahyo, Risma Siahaan, and Beringin Simamora. Their origins are from various regions, some from Medan, Deli Serdang, Aceh, to Sulawesi.

⁴ Muhammad TWH, *Gedung Simpasri Terancam Erosi Sei Deli*, Waspada, 2006.

⁵ Muhammad THW, *Simpasri Gemilang Datang, Gemilang Menghilang*, Analisa Minggu 19 Oktober 2003

⁶ Interview with the artists. Forum Group Discussion, Gallery Unimed, 8 Mei 2022

The method of studying in sanggar Rowo is not much different from the method taught by the Orphan teacher when studying at the Pejeng Studio in Bali. The basics of realist painting with basic skills of mastery of form and color theory in painting. The painting technique taught is the technique of painting impasto with the medium of oil paint on the canvas. This method causes a similarity of techniques between the work of students and teachers, but when they have mastered the painting techniques properly and correctly they experiment and explore themselves in their work so that the characteristics of each painter appear. That way there is no longer any resemblance to each other in their works. The schools of their paintings are manifold. In addition to the naturalists and realists on which their study was based, also appeared surreal and impressionist paintings. In 2020 this studio began to reduce its activities because its caregiver, the painter, M Yatim Mustofa, moved to Jakarta and actively worked in the city⁷. In addition, there are art institutions, several studios, art communities, art houses, and art galleries that have emerged in this area, but most of their existence is not long. Painting activities are usually done by the painters themselves, not handled by art managers. These centers of artistic activity were established by institutions, among painters, and non-painters. There is LESBUMI (Muslim Cultural Arts Institute) Nahdlatul Ulama Deli Serdang chaired by Sumargi Gunarto. There is a Sekar Gunung studio with Frans Najira and Slamet Khairi movers. There is a Dee dee doo gallery owned by entrepreneur Armen, Syahrudin Art Gallery on the shores of Lake Toba, Rowo gallery and TO2 gallery founded by Anang Satoto, Payung Teduh gallery, Tong Sampah gallery, Rajawali art house founded by Irmansyah Lubis, to the Lak-Lak community founded by Ben Pasaribu. There is also a group of painters of the Expressions Tjita Rasa (known as the NORTH group) chaired by R. Triyanto. The local government of North Sumatra Province in 1995 built the Tepian Daya art center in Medan. The painting exhibition entitled *Painting for Investment* at Deli Plaza (August 27-31, 2008)⁸ was attended by 68 painters, but not all participants were painters who were consistent in their work. There are painters who are no longer active as painters after participating in a number of exhibitions. Along with the dimming of the artist associations incorporated in ASRI 45, SIMPASSRI, and Rowo studios as well as other centers of painting activities, the art activities of the painters were carried out independently. They organize exhibitions individually as well as in groups. Exhibitions are held in government-owned hotels, galleries, or Cultural Parks. Art events including painting exhibitions are usually covered by art writers in mass media such as Analisa and Waspada newspapers in print or *online* on the internet. Art writers who often write art articles in the mass media include Amran Eko Prawoto, Sugeng Satya Dharma, Agus Priyatno, Raden Triyanto, Azmi, Heru Maryono, Fuad Erdansyah, Sumargi Gunarto, Muhammad TWH, and Jonson Pasaribu, Analisa Newspaper since 2008 has been reporting on painting *events*. A page about painting, which was originally black and white and just a few columns, became a page with color photographs appearing every Sunday. The news about painting in this media was finally closed after more than a decade due to technological advances, many newspaper readers switched to reading news from the internet. Since 2020, there has been no more art pages that notify painting *events*. The number of newspaper pages was drastically reduced, art pages reporting on painting *events* were also affected. News of painting is still there but appears on cultural sheets sometimes. The Waspada Newspaper, which does not open a special art page, includes news of

⁷ Interview with the artist, Forum Group Discussion, Gallery Unimed, 8 Mei 2022.

⁸ Katalog pameran, *Painting for Investment* 68 pelukis di Deli Plaza, 27-31 Agustus 2008.

painting as well as on the cultural page, sometimes writing about painting *events* is more than half a page.

The most dominant painting theme by North Sumatra painters is about the scenery of Lake Toba, rice fields, beaches, mountains, flora and fauna, forests, *waterfalls*, *hometowns* (*landscape painting*), other themes are paintings about *folklore*, community leaders, customs, traditions, humans and the surrounding nature (*human interest*), cultural artifacts, to the imagination of the painter. There are painters who create consistently in one genre, but there are also painters who create in several genres.

2 Method

The data collection method of this study uses the methods of interviewing, photography, and documentation. Interviews were conducted of 25 painters. Photography is used to document the work of painters. There are more than 300 photographic documentation in the form of painters' photographs, painter studios, paintings, exhibition buildings, and exhibition activities. The documentation is to collect data on writings and images through searching for books, painting articles in newspapers, newsletters, and exhibition catalogs. There are more than 100 articles on modern painting in North Sumatra.

The data analysis method uses a data periodization reference to write chronologically about the existence and development of modern painting in North Sumatra.

3 Discussion

There are some opinions about modern painting. Modern painting is a painting art that has an element of novelty and is an individual expression of its creator. *Modern art may be a picture of a bison scratched twenty thousand years ago on a wall of the Lascaux caves in the southern France. Or it may be a picture painted by Picasso only this morning*⁹. "when did modern art begin?" Some link the beginnings of modern painting of the French Revolution in 1789. Others have chosen 1836, the year of a landmark exhibition of "modern" painting in Paris¹⁰. Modern art begins with the changes in the representation of space introduced by artists of the late eighteenth century¹¹. Hence our account of modern art will be by movements rather than by countries. Only in this way we can we hope to do justice to the fact that modern art, all regional differences notwithstanding, is as international as modern science.¹²

The emergence of modern painting was influenced by the change of the power system from an authoritarian system in the era of monarchical power to a democratic system in the republican form of government. The change in the power system changed the patron relationship between artists (painters). Artists in the authoritarian system in the era of monarchical rule were supported by the kingdom, the aristocrats (noble families), to religious institutions. It changed in the democratic system in the Republican state. In the era of the democratic system of power in the republican government, artists were free to work, no longer painting the family life of kings and nobles or stories of religious institutions. They paint on personal desires, express personal creativity. Their work was purchased by art lovers from the wider community. It no longer belongs to the royal family, the nobles, or religious institutions. Modern painting in North

⁹ Newmeyer, Sarah., 1957, *Enjoying Modern Art*. New York: Mentor Book. p.7

¹⁰ Fichner, Louis -Hundred. 1995, *Understanding Art*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs. p.381.

¹¹ Louis Fichner-Rathus, *Understanding the Art* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Englewood, 1995), p.382.

¹² Janson, H.W. 1995, *History of Art*. Thames and Hudson, Fifth Edition. p.453

Sumatra developed in the democratic system of the modern republican government. Kingdoms and sultanates in the Nusantara region, which were previously based on the monarchical/aristocratic power system, united in a democratic system of republican government in the form of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) on August 17, 1945.

In Indonesia modern painting developed since colonial times, Raden Saleh Syarief Bustaman is the first figure of modern painting in the history of Indonesian modern painting¹³. Furthermore, modern painting appears in paintings by Mooi Indie painters, studio painters, and academic painters after the independence era. After the pioneers developed modern Indonesian painting between 1900 and 1965, the next generation created their own stream and styles. The majority of these contemporary artists live in Jawa¹⁴. The genre or genre of painting by painters is no different from that developed in the West. Helena Spanjard wrote in her article, "*Bandung Laboratory of The West?*",¹⁵. The genres of realists, naturalists, surrealists, expressionists, impressionists, and abstracts are some of the most followed genres by painters.

Modern painting in North Sumatra is part of the development of Indonesian modern painting. Influences on the genre of painting are evident in their works. Although a number of painters have shown uniqueness and authenticity, painting is still in a genre that has become mainstream in Indonesia. A number of painters studied painting techniques outside the island of Sumatra. Painter Muhammad Yatim Mustofa, the founder of the Rowo studio in Tanjung Morawa, Deli Serdang, once learned to paint at the Pejeng Studio in Bali. The caretaker of this studio is the painter Dullah, one of the palace painters in the Soekarno era. Abstract painters Amran Eko Prawoto, Rasinta Tarigan, Oloan Situmorang, and a number of other painters have studied painting at the Indonesian Academy of Fine Arts (ASRI) Yogyakarta. A number of other painters including Didi Prihadi, Hareanto Pasaribu, Dai Lubis, Budiami, Tuter are alumni painters from the fine arts education of Medan State University (Unimed).

Based on their educational background, painters can be grouped into two groups. The first is a self-taught painter, a painter who learns to paint independently. Self-taught painters learned painting not through academic formal education. The second is academic painters, painters who have studied painting academically at the Indonesian Academy of Fine Arts (ASRI) Yogyakarta or painters who have studied at the Unimed Fine Arts Education Study Program. Most of the painters are self-taught painters. They are professional painters whose lives are solely painters by profession.

As professional painters, they create quality works for buyers to be interested in. In addition, they are also always creative and productive in working and publishing it. They organize exhibitions of paintings independently, either individual exhibitions or group cast. They exhibit at the lobby hotel, the Cultural Park, or in the painting gallery. Their exhibitions are published in mass media or *online* on the internet. In that way their paintings are known to the fans of paintings.

The painting enthusiasts who are buyers of their paintings are ordinary people. There are merchants, businessmen, farmers, or government employees. There are also painting collectors who buy their paintings. There are *galleries and art shops* at home and abroad that buy their works. Painters, writers, and fans of painting are intertwined so that an art network is formed.

¹³ Kraus, Werner, 2012, Raden Saleh, The Beginning of Indonesian Modern Painting., Jakarta: Goethe Institute Indonesien. p.2

¹⁴ Spanjaard, Hlelena.2008, Indonesian Odyssey, Singapore: Equinox Publishing. p.8

¹⁵ Fischer, Joseph. 1990, *Modern Indonesian Art*. Berkelay. Jakarta and New York: KIAS Exhibition Committee. p.55

The painting enthusiasts buy paintings directly from the painter. But there are also those who buy through *galleries or art shops*. Painting enthusiasts who actively collect paintings by North Sumatran painters include D.L. Sitorus, a Palm Oil entrepreneur, Armen, an entrepreneur and owner of *art shop* Dee Dee Do, Linda, owner of Linda Gallery in Jakarta. The painters there also sell their works directly, they are not managed by art managers.

The painters work in their private studios, usually also their homes. Ideally professional artists have studios and art galleries to display their work. In North Sumatra, most painters only have studios to create, but do not have galleries to display their paintings. They created paintings using the medium of oil paints and canvases. There are also painters who are creative in creating paintings with sand media. Their oil paints, canvases and painting utensils are selected from the best products sold in painting equipment stores.

The existence and development of painting in North Sumatra is supported by the existence of an association of painters, namely the Indonesian Fine Arts Force 45 (ASRI 45), painters who are members of the Indonesian Fine Arts Artists' Sympaian (SIMPASSRI), and painters from rowo studio. All three are centers of painter activity, where aspiring painters learn to become professional painters. In this place, prospective painters learn from senior painters who already have good painting techniques and have experience exhibiting. They learned painting techniques firsthand, as well as saw the paintings of the maestros from books and magazines. It was in that way that the regeneration of the painter took place.

The most dominant genres or genres of painting are naturalist, realist, surrealist, impressionist, decorative, calligraphy, pointilis, and abstract. The genre or genre is dominant due to idealism and pragmatic factors for the sustainability of art and their lives. Paintings of this genre tend to be in great demand by many people. As for the abstract, the enthusiasts are only from certain circles. Because of this, there are not many abstract painters¹⁶.

Prominent naturalist or realist painters include Muhammad Yatim Mustofa, Hardiman Wisesa, Bambang Triyogo, Hareanto Simatupang, Cecep Priyono, Panji Sutrisno, and Soenoto Hs. The outstanding Impressionist painters are Andi Ian Surya and Didi Suprihadi. The prominent pointilis painter was Bambang Soekarno. The prominent surrealist painter was Jonson Pasaribu. Prominent abstract painters are Machzum Siregar, Amran Eko Prawoto, Syahrudin Harahap, and Machzum Siregar. Prominent decorative painters were Muhammad Saleh, Budi Siagian, and Oloan Situmorang. A prominent calligraphic painter is Handono Hadi¹⁷.

4 Conclusion

Modern painting, including modern painting in North Sumatra is the result of the creation of painters who live in the democratic power system of the republican government. The existence and sustainability of modern painting in North Sumatra is supported by the existence of an artist association called ASRI 45 (established in 1945), SIMPASSRI (founded 1967), and Sanggar Rowo (founded in 1988). These associations are the center of the painters' activities in improving the quality of works, broadening the horizons of art through discussion, and adding experience through exhibitions.

Since the ASRI association, SIMPASSRI, and rowo studio receded, the painter's activities have been carried out independently. They worked and exhibited their paintings individually and in groups. They exhibit in hotels, galleries, or Cultural Parks. The existence of galleries, art shops,

¹⁶ Priyatno, Agus. 2012, *Memahami Seni Rupa*, Medan: Unimed Press. p.156

¹⁷ Priyatno, Agus. 2015, *Lukisan-Lukisan Kreasi Pelukis Sumatera Utara*, Medan: Unimed Press. p.18

art collectors, and ordinary people who buy their paintings makes modern painting in this area still exist.

A number of activity centers for painters such as art houses, galleries, and art communities existed not long ago. They appeared and disappeared out of thin air. This is due to the absence of an art manager. Exhibitions organized by painters are published by art writers in the local mass media offline (print) and online (*online on the internet*). Thus their works are known to the wider community of painting enthusiasts from the local area, nationally, and internationally. The media that most reported on art (painting) is the newspaper *Analisa dan Waspada*.

The painters in North Sumatra include Daud Yusuf, Tino Sidin, Nasyah Jamin, Hasan Siregar, Ismail Daulay, R.M Aulia (from the painting society ASRI 45). SIMPASSRI painters include Muhammad Saleh, Machzum Siregar, Syamsul Bahri, Amran Eko Prawoto, Azis SB, Utoyo Hadi, Handono Hadi. Reins Asmara, Rasinta Tarigan, S. Serayu, Ibrahim Syam, Said Saleh, Arfi Rahmat, Heru Wiryono, Slamet Khairi, Yoesafrizal, Yandi Ario, Sarmin Dirja, Naswir Nazar, HMY Soekarno, Bambang Soekarno, Panji sutrisno, Soenoto HS, Yoesafrizal, Syahrudin Harahap, Winarto Kartupat, Mangatas Pasaribu, Fuad Erdansyah, Ary Darma, Yasir Lubis, Mazil Safar, Kidro, Suhendro Hamid. Hamid Naban, Oncop Mulyono.

Painters from Rowo studio include Muhammad Yatim Mustofa, Bambang Triyogo, Didi Prihadi, Alwan Sanrio, Hardiman Wisesa, Farah, Cecep Priyono, Wan Saad, Mulyadi, Ary Darma, Herdy An, Adril Husni, Dai Lubis, Budiarni, Iwan Vero, Saliman, Eko Cahyo, Risma Siahaan, and Beringin Simamora. The painters from among the young people were Jonson Pasaribu, Achy Akhswana, Popi Andri Harahap, Hareanto Pasaribu, and Tuttur.

Until now, modern painting in North Sumatra still exists and still survives. Qualitatively the number of painters did not increase significantly from year to year. Some painters left the world, some young painters appeared. In quality, the paintings remained undisturbed. There have been changes in style, themes, and techniques in a number of painters. Exhibitions of paintings remain although rare. Writing about painting is still carried out even though it is not published in newspapers. Buyers of their work are also still there. The development of painting in this area is moving slowly.

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