

# Dehumanism in Contemporary Arts

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## Abstract

*The phenomenon of contemporary art commodification in the context of the global art market further showed symptoms of the total dehumanism. This phenomenon is signed by the accumulation of contemporary art prices are solely the views from its economic value. The contemporary art price is constructed through art market infrastructure completely oriented networking game with massive capital. Works of art from the Renaissance era is believed to have the values of humanism, the commodification of contemporary art practice such values deconstructed. These symptoms as a result of a shift in perspective (world view) in the arts and culture that was unanimously declared the end of authenticity and originality, the end of the aesthetic, and the end value of humanism in the art itself. These symptoms will be the focus in this paper with accompanying analysis of the impact of the commodification of art, both in discourse and art practice in Indonesia.*

**Key word:** *commodification, contemporary art, dehumanism.*

## A. Introduction: Shifting of Paradigm

Nowdays there has been a paradigm shift in the arts, when the era of globalization entered almost all dimensions of life, from the transcendent to the profane. Globalization is real not only encourage a paradigm shift, but in many cases actually change it. All the basic categories that have been used for understanding to self, art, culture, religion, science, and humanity, in this era of questionable relevance and usefulness. Various authorities, myth, domination, and hegemony in the various dimensions of life, including the arts, it is now to be questioned. That is, the concepts, it is now doubtful validity and credibility in many ways, including in the arts.

All aesthetic categories, style, language of expression (sign), discourse, until the values behind the work of art, which used to be the principal concept of modernism is also doubtful relevance. Dichotomy of western art and eastern art, fine art and applied art, high art and low art, in today's context is considered not to have dominance over any interpretation of art in the variety of entities.

These kinds of symptoms then appeared many terms to mark a paradigm shift or change it. Its peak when the term postmodern articulated simultaneously

to mark the end (hegemony) modernism. From here then appeared various derivative terms are all re-worded question; differentiation becomes dedifferentiation, construction becomes deconstruction, mystification becomes demystified, mythology becomes demythology, centralized to decentralized, canonization into decanonization, and humanism became dehumanism.

This kind of symptoms that are articulate echoed by Adorno (1973), Foster (1983), Burgin (1986), Danto (1997), by saying the end of art. Meaning of this statement does not mean that there is no practice of art and art entities altogether. The indication is solely to reproduce of an art discourse, either ontological, epistemological, and axiological. The indication is indeed such a critical accumulation of struggles of the Western modern art, which since medieval times as a canvas suing the autonomous representation of reality. In the the canvas (painting) which was believed to be autonomous representation of ideas and artistic finesse though achieved only by certain people who later called the maestro. The maestro is then believed to create works (painting and sculpture) which have the aura and autonomy (masterpiece) that represents the majesty of man as the center of civilization (anthropomorphic).

However, the masterpiece trust that culminated in the Renaissance, and then collapsed when Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) in a provocative exhibit urinal (Fountain) as a work of art in 1917. Duchamp's provocation discuss other aesthetic autonomy, also run in canvas (painting) itself is considered to dominate the development of the western modern art history (Dempsey, 2002: 115-119).

Since then, the artist is no longer sucked in canvas attraction, but an artist to be free run in anything else through a variety of media and is considered to be a new expression language. Duchamp's provocation is proven to have a wide alarmingly. Art in the present context is increasingly becoming purely a personal statement. Of course, these symptoms lately quite ironic when people celebrate the end of subjects as articulated by Foucault (1989), the death of the author as stated by Barthes (1977), or the end of modernism as asserted by Foster (1985) and the end of ideology according to Bell (1988).

Meanwhile, globalization is driven by the power of capitalism and cyber technology, its reality to fold the world into a world constructed by the commodification. In fact, in the recent era, there are symptoms of hyper-commodification (Piliang, 2011; 2012). These symptoms show more paradigmatic relationship, when art becomes merely a personal statement that does not deal with the values of grandeur (canon), symptoms of growing commodification of art encourages the values of humanism loss. So, today's art practice with the commodification frame show more flavor economic phenomenon - the economics of taste (Robertson, 2005).

The symptoms are interesting to be explored, especially linkages underlying thought paradigm shift or change art lately increasingly articulate presence and influence. The focus of the study and the analysis will be focused on current symptoms that correlate with commodification of art, which in many ways has art world is systematically worked, using the strength of the networking, and great financial power. At this point in my observations in the context of the crisis

occurred artistic vision from the beginning believed as the board of truth after philosophy, religion, and science.

## **B. Commodification**

Contemporary art in the context of cutting-edge can not be separated from the power of the commodification of art, both in the context of local and global art market (Stallabrass, 2004). The growth of contemporary art in various parts of the world, including in Asia also experienced interaction with the global art market. In fact, the interaction with the global art market, artists in Asia to get the same recognition to artists in Europe and America. Asian contemporary art has stated emphatically grow together and become an important part of the international art infrastructure. This phenomenon as revealed Chiu (2011: 2) as follows.

“Globalization – cultural as well as economic – may have extended the international art world’s reach in emerging markets in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, but it is not the only factor at work here. The fact that contemporary Asian artists are now accorded art world recognition on a par with their contemporaries in Europe and the United States should seem natural to anyone with a deeper sense of history: Asia is home to some of the world’s longest, richest cultural traditions, not to mention more than half the world’s population. The remarkable spread of prosperity across Asia in the past few decades has also created a regional market and audience for art, coupled with investment in art infrastructure – most countries in the region, in particular in East and South Asia, have gallery systems, auction houses, art biennials and triennials, even an abundance of alternative spaces and private and public museums. Infrastructure purity provided opportunities for local artistic advancement, promotion, and exchange, and, over time, integration of the Asian art scene into the international art world”.

Symptoms such as described Chiu parallel with my previous analysis under the heading *Representasi Identitas di Medan Pasar Seni Lukis Indonesia - Representation of Identity in the Indonesia Art Market* (2007). Symptoms of the outbreak of the art market in Indonesia is indeed the result of a domino effect that occurred in the global art market, both in Europe, America, and Asia. It triggered a domino effect on the perception of art in the context of commodities and investments. These symptoms can be traced historically socially on the global phenomenon that occurred in the mid-1980s, where a number of Japanese conglomerate bought masterpieces of world’s painting. They bought works by Monet, van Gogh, Cezanne, Degas from Christie's and Sotheby's auction houses. They dare to buy the world a masterpiece, not another due to the booming Japanese economy and also there is some sort of great design that shifts the center of the contemporary art world in Japan. In the next section I explain as follows.

"The domino effect was rapid impact on the dynamics of art, especially in the Asia Pacific region. These symptoms creep up to coincide with several elite Indonesian economic confusion invest money when the peak of Indonesia's economic growth, the mid-1980s, until the advent of the economic crisis of the late 1990s. They suddenly switch as hunter painting is considered a master class, and resell in the market arena when it grows incredible. This growth also triggered the opening of the two auction houses in Singapore and Hong Kong. This phenomenon shows that the Asia-Pacific region has become a battlefield art market in line with the growth of the middle class and the elite and tycoons who are in a state of war symbol. These social classes emerge through the desire to collect that later turned into a desire to invest.

Meanwhile, socio-economically, in Indonesia were significant changes. Entering the 1990s, the New Order government corrupt already fragile, the symbolic end of Suharto as an icon of the New Order collapsed in May 1998. The fall of Soeharto in fact the accumulation of multidimensional crisis that has recently occurred. Practice-authoritarian centralized government eventually forces only legitimize the hegemony of certain socio-economic institutions of society. So, consequently when the world economic storm lasted, Indonesia became the victim of a very tragic and hard to get up again. The reforms era that are expected to re-arrange the chaos in various sectors, in fact there are no signs of improvement towards. Thus, practically Indonesia is currently in a state of chaos in terms of anything, including the art world apparently.

However, even in a state of chaos that the economic elite who are still hesitant or scared to invest his capital in trade, property, services and industry, utilizing the chaos in the world of art that is considered safe and is projected to have a double advantage. At that moment the painting is formatted into merchandise (commodity traded freely). Finally, the 1990s art world characterized predominantly by the behavior of the commodification of painting on a large scale. And this condition continues to this day" (Djatiprambudi, 2007: 11-12).

Commodification of contemporary art in the end simultaneously a symptom that hides a paradox. In particular the work of contemporary art hunted and collected because of the belief in the intrinsic value of the artwork. This trust is built through traditional artwork objectively study by analyzing the formal elements that rests on aesthetic form. Analysis of this kind of discourse which then led to various debates in the field tested through discourse. With this, the works of art find a text that is constantly discussed, and finally stopped at a conclusion on which side of the artwork that has historically contributed, and therefore became an icon of art history.

Meanwhile, on the other side of contemporary artworks hunted and collected solely rely on the issues that occur in the market infrastructure that does not rely on the intrinsic excellence. Artwork hunted through market mechanisms that rely on the economic value contained in the work. Games more of the income

into consideration. Works of art in these conditions does not rely on canonical values, but rather rests on the political and market mechanisms (extrinsic). In politics the market is always going on mechanisms designed by certain parties (alliances art dealers, galleries, and collectors) to create of new issues related to the work of art that is being used as a commodity.

Ironically, the art market in Indonesia is stronger the second show symptoms. Thus, since the first art boom in the late 1980s, Sanento Yuliman critically analyze the impact accompanist art boom, namely by saying; impoverishment, marginalization, seclusion, concentration, and blind of reference (Hasan, 2001: 115-122). Art market in Indonesia, so it proved to the present discourse infrastructure does not grow well. Discourse and critique the art world did not get a good room as objectively assess institution-critical works of art and art practice. This phenomenon is very different from Japan, China, and South Korea, the dynamics of the art market occurs through a mechanism that is symmetric between market infrastructure and discourse infrastructure.

Market mechanisms that clearly shows the patterns of commodification relies on the view that the work of art is an investment object. This view then triggers the assumption that the work of art is able to double the capital (Galenson, 2006). From here, it appears as said Guattari (1995; 1996) as the engine's desire. Art market apart from the intrinsic assessment in turn encourage the emergence of a postmodern economic engine, which produces goods and produce at the same desires. With this, the consumption (works of art that are not controlled) market in the field is an expression of the desire impulses in human beings infinite. Space consumption, then becomes where everyone displays social behavior which seems artificial, taking social symbol, and ends with the symbolic power of the wanted (Bourdieu, 1984; 1993, and Grenfell and Hardy, 2007).

Meanwhile, the observation Klaus Honneth, as described Siregar (2009: 11), is a popular contemporary art has been integral to the middle-class society. For Honneth, in a few decades back, amid ongoing difficult to deny a significant increase when people happily buy the latest works of art. In addition to buying an expensive car, they buy paintings, sculpture and photographic works of young artists. The buyer is understood that by buying contemporary art, their social prestige by itself raised higher. This phenomenon does not seem to occur only in Europe [...], but also applies everywhere, not least in Indonesia today.

### **C. Dehumanism**

Commodification of contemporary art practiced, both in the local and global scale, secretly hid the issue of termination values of humanism in works of art. This phenomenon is demonstrated by the behavior of the market by focusing on the behavior of hyper-consumption. This behavior is characterized by a logic of utility defeated by the logic of passion, and then headed toward conditions that go beyond the (hyper). In the logic of this kind, all kinds of goods consumed is not based on transcendent values, grandeur, and refer to the values of humanity. However, the logic is built only to satisfy the desire to form a sign of war in the context of life style in contemporary culture.

Works of contemporary art in the context of hyper-consumption was not contested because of its intrinsic value, but because of the work that has been rumored as a sign to represent a lifestyle that goes beyond the logic of reality (hyper-reality). This kind of lifestyle requires space and time, money and goods, which is loaded with a certain symbolic meaning. Symbolic representation lifestyle space such as galleries, auction houses, and a variety of events that are considered prestigious art used as a meeting room for displaying hyper-consumption and desire to master certain social symbols.

In the model of this kind of hyper consumption, contemporary artworks used as a symbol of spectacle which serial, circular, and spectacular. Works of contemporary art that made the object will come successive, high speed, in a series that showed the lifestyle desires that go beyond the meaning of the work itself (Debord, 1987). Under conditions of this kind work of art that is made an object of consumption goods that turn out to be dramatized in such a way that goes beyond the basic nature of his art. Therefore, the price of works of art (art price) in the context of hyper-consumption logic does not relate to the values of aesthetic-philosophical, but the price of the work is formed through a mechanism involving the commodification of the art infrastructure that has been dominated by the capitalism system of art (Smiers, 2009; Horowitz , 2011).

Accordingly, Horowitz (2011: xiii) asserts that the first decade of the new millennium occurred biggest boom in the history of the art market. "The first decade of the new millennium witnessed one of the greatest booms in the history of the art market. At its core was the dizzying rise of contemporary art, and as it quickly intervening and confidently asserted itself as the most lucrative sales category, rife speculation about the relationship between art and value took hold". This explanation indicates that the dynamics of the art market which speculation plays, connecting between the artwork and its economic value.

The economic value that is the main issue in the context of contemporary culture, which is based on the paradigm of neoliberalism. This paradigm-oriented free market (free trade). The market mechanism is formed through the domination of capital developed countries (G-7) supported the industrialists engaged in the political-economic layers, that influence, even directing economic policy world entirely. Neoliberal world in conjunction with the development of art in the development of the art of making motion become parasitic on capital strength behind the art praxis. In this context, the artwork is then considered as the units of the chain of the art industry, which brought the art of being the object of political manipulation. As Adorno said, the art of affirmative to false consciousness, which in turn can destroy the autonomy of art, and art became affirmative to power.

Meanwhile, in the era of the free market as it is now, the practical art of being so rational, calculating the economy, and make art as a mass consumption. Art is treated as a commodity that can be produced and reproduced simultaneously. In this kind of condition, art no longer has the effect of cosmic-reflective irrational, losing the representation of inner space, eventually leading dehumanisme conditions. This condition is contrary to the essence of art and the art of tasks in the life of human culture as a catalyst in the culture itself. In short, the neoliberal world has been deconstructed art from imatation-cosmos becomes

merely a commodity-trading nature of its character is determined by the market culture (Djatiprambudi, 2009: 83).

#### **D. Closing**

Market dynamics as I say in *Pendidikan Seni (Rupa) Versus Pasar - Art Education Versus Market* ( Djatiprambudi, 2009: 104-106 ) that are so large as to proclaim the paradox, when we tried to ask his contribution to the development of supra-and infrastructure arts education in Indonesia. As the market exhibiting his capital coffers, art education is precisely the difficulty to maintain their existence. In this region, for example, is often a melancholy news sound fine arts courses animonya fallen sharply. This news has not added news about the lack of funds to operate educational art, art journals which are threatened with bankruptcy because there is no adequate funding, research art overshadowed the lack of funds. This is why, the bargaining position of art education on the one hand and the market on the other hand was not balanced. How could the thought of art as a reference in the field of art world is strong, if supra and education infrastructure is so fragile? How might art education infrastructure is very small funds can communicate loudly in the middle of the current capital markets wallowing?

In fact, a strong market must be balanced with a strong discourse. A strong discourse that can only be born of a strong arts education infrastructure, through in-depth studies, objective, and neutral from various pragmatic interests (market). Without this, what happens is a kind of art historical materialism motion. It is a form of historical dialectic that moves over the dominance of the owners of capital (the bourgeoisie) to workers of art (artists, curators, critics, researchers, etc.). Ideology that brought the owners of capital over the market ideology characterized by a spirit of commodification of art on a large scale. As a result, the market is too strong and dominant, so that he can manipulate anything he wants, without any criticism domain. These symptoms are simultaneously in the context of changes in the world which is based on the paradigm of neoliberalism, the art of losing autonomy to position his soul, and loss of dignity as a bearer aspirations of humanism. \*\*\*

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