

From The Editor

The arts have the ability to represent. Nevertheless, how and what they represent differ from one culture to another. The essays in this volume illustrate various forms of representation in the arts of Southeast Asia. The study of representation helps us to understand more about cultural contexts, ideology, gender, war, functions and identity.

In “Re-Designing the Role of *Phalak* and *Phalam* in Modern Lao *Ramayana*”, Gisa Jähnichen looks at why women have been employed to play the roles of *Phalak* and *Phalam* (Lakshman and Rama of the classical *Ramayana*) in Laos. By investigating various *Ramayana* manuscripts, what *Phalak* and *Phalam* represent, and interviewing performers in Laos, she discusses why it is believed that women are most suited to the ‘special physical and emotional demands of the dance drama’. She also analyses how the emotions of *Phalak* and *Phalam* are represented through the music and movements.

Muhizam Mustafa explores the roles and values of public art in Putrajaya, the new federal administrative centre of Malaysia, in his article, “Public Art in the Federal Territory of Putrajaya: Questions of Value and Role”. He argues that selected local crafts, fauna, ceremonial spaces, and architecture are used to represent a city which is modern yet with a Malaysian-Islamic identity. This identity is further imagined through sculptures and designs.

Juliana Abdul Wahab and Mahyuddin Ahmad show in their essay “Box Office Films and Ideology: A Case Study of Selected Films in Malaysia” that box-office films are media which represent and disseminate “dominant values, symbols and concepts that legitimise the existing social order”. Representation here has the ability to shift the balance of power.

In the “The Functions of the *Balanse Madam* Dance in the Social Life of Nias Society in Padang City”, Indrayuda, investigates a form of dance which emerged as a result of Portuguese and Nias interaction in the seventeenth century in Padang. By looking at the functions of the dance, Indrayuda concludes that *Balanse Madam Dance* represents social interaction among different communities in everyday life.

Izmer’s artwork *Garden* is the artist’s representation of the suffering, tragic experiences, vulnerability, and courage of the people during the civil war in Algiers.

The art exhibition and book reviewed here are also works of representation. Suryadi reviews Jeremy Wallach’s book entitled *Modern Noise, Fluid Genres: Popular Music in Indonesia, 1997–2001*, published by the University of Wisconsin Press. Wallach explores the representation of Indonesian popular music during the *Reformasi*, a period of political change in Indonesia. Safrizal reviews the exhibition ‘Go Block’ which illustrates how five Malaysian printmakers have experimented with new technics, methods and concepts in their artworks to represent contemporary issues in the region.

Finally, Volume 9 will be my last as Chief Editor. I would like to thank all contributors, members of the advisory board and editorial board for their support and assistance. Wacana Seni has provided scholars of Asian performing arts an opportunity to dialogue and internationalise their scholarship. Thank you for taking this journey of arts discourse with me.

Tan Sooi Beng
Chief Editor