

# TRAVERSING THE BOUNDARIES?

ART AND FILM IN INDONESIA WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO  
*PERBATASAN / BOUNDARIES:*  
*LUCIA HARTINI, PAINTINGS FROM A LIFE*

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## **Disclaimer**

This doctoral dissertation was prepared for publication under conditions of extreme duress compounded by a virus-infected memory stick resulting in the inadvertent printing of several undetected typographical errors and syntactical “re-arrangements”. Because the subsequent listing of all errata is impossible, attention is drawn to the following pages where these problems have affected both the meaning of the argument and important substantiating details: 13, 31, 54, 67, 68, 69, 88, 95 fn., 110 fn., 142, 171, 182, 183 fn., 196, 211 fn., 229 (whole page), 237, 250, 276, 290, 317 fn..

Jennifer Dudley

STATEMENT

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution. All sources are acknowledged in the footnotes and the bibliography.

Signed: .....

Jennifer Ann Dudley

## ABSTRACT

The repressive political conditions of the New Order state and the social dislocation caused by rapid industrial and technological development unquestionably affected the nature of artistic and cultural production in Indonesia. This thesis considers the dynamic of these conditions within a focused long-term study of the art and life of Indonesian “*Surrealis*” painter, Lucia Hartini. My doctoral dissertation comprises this thesis and the forty-two minute documentary film *Perbatasan / Boundaries: Lucia Hartini, Paintings from a Life* (1999 – 2002) which I filmed in Indonesia and presents Lucia Hartini and her art in the context of her times from the historical standpoint of *Reformasi* and millennial change. Art historically, this thesis informs us of a wider journey, that of selected twentieth century Indonesian contemporary artists exploring concepts of simulacra, hyper-reality, the meta-real and the surreal through the stylistic use of photo-realism.

Lucia Hartini is known for her “*Beautiful Surrealism*”. A founding member of the “*Surrealis Yogya*”, formed in 1985, she was the only woman from the original group to continue painting professionally from the late 1970s, throughout the New Order, and into the era of Reform. The consideration of Lucia Hartini’s work in this thesis acknowledges the gradual shift in her concerns. Lucia’s paintings respond to her natural and social environment, as well as to the challenges and dramatic changes in her life. This thesis charts the journey of her artistic maturation, so richly embodied in her third solo exhibition, “*Irama Kehidupan / The Spirit of Life*”, in January 2002. Through a critical commentary on paintings selected from her oeuvre and the textual analysis of *Perbatasan / Boundaries*, I discuss Lucia Hartini’s subject matter, unique systems of image formation and use of detail, her particular contribution to the characteristic qualities of Indonesian “*Surrealisme*”. I regard the techniques, conceptual approaches and processes of filmmaking as intrinsic to this exploration, a methodological perspective arising from Hendro Wiyanto (2001) observation that Indonesia’s “*Surrealis*” artists present us with “reality bundled as a dream”.

Lucia Hartini’s work raises questions of gender and personal transformation. This thesis argues that, for many years, the tensions created by the contrary forces of political repression and social transformation characterising much of New Order Indonesia, were reflected in her art. In a microcosmic-macrocosmic sense, Lucia and her art quietly contributed to attitudinal and social change in Indonesia. Works painted between 1986 and 1996 autobiographically chart a shift from personal distress

to a growing sense of empowerment, followed by life-changing spiritual growth. I contextualize these paintings socially by studying the changing interstices between Lucia Hartini's private life, her professional creative practice and the public persona she adopted in Indonesia's emergent civilian society. My approach is informed by a conceptual framework based on difference, hybridity and its transformations, on the psychology of borderlands, negotiation and the transcendence of boundaries, witnessed through a study of the spiritual practice and quest for religious tolerance important to Lucia and evident in her art. This thesis reveals those boundaries which were transcended and those which remain negotiable.

Twice filming Lucia Hartini's art, I was also affected by the dramatically different conditions of production prevailing in 1992 in New Order Indonesia and those possible between 1999 and 2001 during *Reformasi*. These differences are highlighted in the textual analysis of *Perbatasan / Boundaries*. Engaging comparisons between contemporary Indonesian art and Indonesian documentary and feature films, I discuss important attempts to solve the problems associated with restrictions on freedom of expression in paintings made prior to *Reformasi*. I consider the different uses of figurative realism to depict subjects deemed controversial by the state, and the creation of credible representations in art and convincing characterisations in filmmaking. The dramatically real yet poetic work of the Indonesian Neo-realist filmmakers of the 1950s exemplified one such solution. Their films and ideas prompted comparisons with the photo-realism, poetic intent and dramatic juxtapositional image making of the "*Surrealis Yogya*". The relationship I perceive between Neo-realist cinematic practice and contemporary international documentary filmmaking encouraged me to make a documentary about Lucia rather than a purely creative or experimentally surreal work. Because of *Reformasi* and the changes wrought by Lucia's personal development, *Perbatasan / Boundaries: Lucia Hartini, Paintings from a Life* (1999 – 2002) is the documentary which my first short experimental video, *Pusaran / Vortex: From the Kitchen to Outer Space* (1992 - 1993), made during the New Order, could not be.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I wish to thank my teachers in Yogyakarta, particularly the late Bagong Kussudiardja with whom I studied, and from whose *sanggar* I learned much. I treasure the memories of the ASRI students who became my friends and the artists and writers they are today. Their work has provided many of the insights and sources for this dissertation. Special thanks go to Haryanto (Totok) and Elizabeth Basuki, through whom I met Dadang Christanto, Eddie Hara and then Lucia. Thanks also to Michael O'Ferrall with whom I have been able to share enthusiasm and information across the years. In her professional capacity as the head of Indonesia's Department for Education and the Arts, a brilliant and knowledgeable dancer as well as a scholar of repute, Dra. Ibu Edi Sedyawati twice approved my requests to visit Indonesia with my cameras to research and compile documentation on Indonesia's artists and performers. I also appreciate the assistance of Studio Audio Visuel, Yogyakarta, on three occasions since 1990.

Indonesia's national passion for the arts has meant there are private archives of reviews and catalogues and Indonesian critics and arts writers with whom to confer. A big thank you to Indonesia's press, its filmmakers and media, and to the lively email lists I frequented in the course of my research, John Clark's *Indonesia-L Archives*, *Apa Kabar*, *kpd Pijar* and *Joyo*, as well as journal, gallery and art websites and the Javafredders. I wish to thank my MPhil. supervisor at Murdoch, Dr. Paul Stange who suggested I upgrade my study program to a PhD. Particular thanks go to Associate Professor Dr. Carol Warren who accepted me mid-stream. Without her editorial severity this work would be hazy indeed. As a Tanzanian, a filmmaker and an academic, Dr. Martin Mhando provided me with many informed suggestions concerning documentary filmmaking and its scholarship. I also wish to thank Dr. Ann-

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Although 1972, the year of my first return to Indonesia, now seems far away indeed, this acknowledgement would be incomplete without expressing gratitude to my guiding spirits for the long, sometimes hair-raising but most amazing journey recorded in my films and this thesis. On a more practical note, thanks go to my sister Margaret Bowden for her invaluable last minute assistance; to Michael Muller for his good judgement and digital editing skills; to Andrew Tapsall, Mark Busani and Damien Fasolo for their technical assistance throughout my PhD., and to my dog Scrap who kept many demons at bay. Finally, I offer a special appreciation in memory of my late husband, R. D. J. Weathersbee whose experiences in Indonesia many years before mine are woven into the historical background to this thesis.

## NOTES and ABBREVIATIONS

Indonesian words and titles have been translated throughout this thesis. For ordinary words, English translations appear in brackets after the Indonesian word, except for titles of Indonesian paintings and films where a forward slash separates the two languages. Proper names of people and places are not translated, while institutions are introduced by their Indonesian name, their acronym and then translated into English. The acronym is used subsequently.

Where I have quoted conversations in interviews and films, or cited comments appearing in the mass media, my recordings and translations are verbatim, as transcribed. As parts of this thesis are exercises in visual translation and interpretation, I have distinguished wherever possible between what Lucia has said about the works, my immediate and considered responses, informed by historical context and background information and those commentaries contributed by others. As an outsider looking in, albeit from a privileged vantage point, I apologize in advance for any mistakes made.



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## REPRODUCTIONS

All paintings are by Lucia Hartini unless stated otherwise. Regarding film stills, I am listed as the director of *Pusaran / Vortex: From the Kitchen to Outer Space* (1993) and *Perbatasan / Boundaries: Lucia Hartini, Paintings from a Life* (2000, 2002) as Jenni Dudley and Jennifer Delandays when these two films are first cited. The names of all other filmmakers whose stills are reproduced appear with the title of their films.

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## ERRATA

p.315. “the controlled abandon of groundedness, distinguishing surrealism” should read  
the controlled abandon of groundedness, distinguishing her surrealism