Aesthetic Study on Permadi Lyosta's Works: The Artist of Lekra from Takengon – Aceh Central

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Abstract:- This article investigates Permadi Lyosta's works from an aesthetic point of view by applying qualitative research methods and descriptive analysis. The technique used is to document Permadi Lyosta's works in in-depth interviews with resource persons who are considered competent and credible. Next, analyse and evaluate the data, classify and reduce the data, and then write the research results. The results that can be put forward are that the ideology believed to be for the benefit of the public is not just a sign or standard of norms to be guided. But it seems that Permadi has been ingrained in his flesh, painting as if it was just a vehicle or a way to apply this ideology. Painting or being a painter is not the only goal but a bridge to achieve what he is being fought for. Therefore, Permadi's paintings do not tend to be in an abstract/imaginative style but depict the real life of the people he has travelled with. Because of that, understanding Permadi's aesthetics is not enough if seen from his paintings but also by tracing his life's bitter and sweet lives. Permadi offers an aesthetic that is not only socialist and revolutionary but also humanistic.

Keywords:- Lekra, Permadi Lyosta, Humanistic Aesthetics.

I. INTRODUCTION

Permadi Lyosta was born in Takengon, Gayo, Central Aceh, November 25, 1932. He died at the age of 90 at 13:30 WIB, February 2, 2022, at his residence, Kampung Dedalu, Lut Tawar District, Central Aceh, precisely next to the Lut Police Sector. Bid. Permadi is the middle child of five siblings. Permadi grew up in a Gayo tribal farming family that owns their rice fields and fields. This Gayo-blooded painter was one of the most famous artists of his time. As noted in one of his solo exhibition catalogues – the only catalogue we found, Permadi Lyosta had studied basic painting at Student Company College School (equivalent to Taman Siswa) in Takengon in 1945. In 1947 he was listed as an army lighting painter in Langsa. Then in 1950 moved to the city of Medan as a painter, and in 1952 he moved from Medan to Yogyakarta. Apart from being a creative artist, intense, and full of enthusiasm in his work, that year, he also joined a member of famous studio founded in 1947, namely the studio which is often called the Pelukis Rakyat (People's Painting) Association (from now on, abbreviated as PR).

PR is an artist association founded by Hendra Gunawan and Affandi, a part of the *Seniman Indonesia Muda* (Young Indonesian Artists) studio (from now on abbreviated as SIM, founded in 1946) after they left the studio in 1947. As noted in the literature, PR consists of the following names: Hendra Gunawan, Trubus, Rutamadji, C.j. Ali marhaban, Sajono, Abas Alibasyah, Fadjar Sidik, Kusnadi, Nasir Bondan, Djoni Trisno, Soetopo, Permadi Lyosta, Chairul Bahri, Yuski Hakim, Martian Sagara, Trisnol Sjawal, Arahmad, Ramli, Batara Lubis, Itji Tarmizi, Kristofer Latuputi, Asmun, and Sahit (Susanto, 2018).

Afandi and other members are pretty solid because of the common understanding between PR members, an understanding in the form of taking the sides of the artists to the small community. But not long after, on August 17, 1950, the *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat* (People's Cultural Institute) or Lekra was formed. With the same spirit or ideology, most PR members became members of Lekra. Their ideology is shown/expressed in the form of depictions of the lives of commoners on canvas, especially workers and peasants likewise, the appearance of the scratches in Permadi's works. Together with PR, Permadi does exhibit not only nationally but also internationally. From 1958-1959 Permadi had the opportunity to go to China (Peking) to study traditional painting techniques there. In addition, he also had the chance to hold an exhibition with a famous artist there, Chen Panting. Then, in 1960–1964, with Rutamadji and other members of the People's Painter, Permadi also had the opportunity to exhibit again in Berlin-Germany, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Spain. The preamble of LEKRA 1950 stated criticism of the new indigenous elite suspected of attempting to defend Indonesia's neocolonial culture, which had an "anti-people, feudal, and imperialist" character. Permadi's works also frequently take the form of paintings or sketches highlighting the lives of the poor or lower class, and this is consistent with the ideology adopted by PR and Lekra (Gultom, 2019). Based on considerations of political movements, the stretch of the creative process and his views on the mass movement to achieve independence at that time can be seen clearly in each of his paintings.

Besides his passion for the arts, Permadi is also considered in his views that can burn the Indonesian people's spirit towards independence. Because several times in several areas, he also acted as a driving force for the masses to achieve independence. Therefore, he also refers to Sartono

Kartodirdjo's concept, which states that understanding a person's sociocultural background is necessary to understanding their personality. Examples include where they were raised, how they experienced formal and informal education processes, the nature of the people around them, memoirs, diaries, letters, and so on. (Kartodirdjo, 1993).

Based on the explanation above, several problems were formulated as follows: 1) What was the form or style of Permadi Lyosta's works before and after joining as a member of Lekra? 2) What ideas influenced Permadi Lyosta's works throughout his artistic process? 3) What kind of aesthetic does Permadi Lyosta offer through his works?

Based on the background and problem formulation above, the objectives of this research are as follows: 1) To examine the style of Permadi Lyosta's works before and after joining Lekra, 2) To know the ideas that influence Permadi Lyosta's works, 3) To know the aesthetics which is how Permadi Lyosta offers through his works.

The results of this study are expected to provide benefits:

1) By examining the style of Permadi Lyosta's works before and after joining Lekra, it is hoped that in the future, they can become reference material or comparisons for art creators or researchers (especially those in Aceh; both academics and nonacademics) in exploring new techniques, thus creating new styles, 2) By knowing the ideas that influence Permadi Lyosta's works, it is expected that current artists or researchers will also compare them in exploring new ideas, especially highlighting issues present in Aceh, 3) By knowing the aesthetics that Permadi Lyosta offers through his works, it is wished that it can offer a different point of view in reading the phenomena that occur in society.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is based on the aesthetic framework. Therefore, the following is the definition of aesthetics according to several figures. According to Bohdan Dziemidok (in Simatupang, 2013), aesthetics is a philosophical discipline – specifically, the philosophy of aesthetic phenomena that focuses on objects, qualities, experiences, and values (in Simatupang, 2013). Aesthetics used in art has the same root as the medical term anaesthesia, namely the Greek word aesthesis, which means sensory perception – or taste. In line with Losche and Howard Murphy (in Simatupang, 2013), aesthetics used in art has the same root as the medical term anaesthesia, namely the Greek word aesthesis, which means sensory perception – or taste. In line with Losche, Howard Murphy (Junaedi, 2021).

The thoughts above have many similarities. However, in this study, the researcher relies on the derivatives of view offered by Deni Junaedi in reading a work of art, namely the aesthetic subject, the aesthetic object, and the aesthetic value. (Junaedi, 2021). Furthermore, Junaedi explained that an aesthetic object is an aspect that someone observes or creates, for example, painting, sculpture, dance, theatre, music, literature, etc. Aesthetic subject means the observer who observes or the creator who makes an aesthetic object. In other

words, between the artist and the audience. While the aesthetic value is the benchmark used by the subject to weigh the beauty or ugliness, interest or disinterest in an object, each measure can be relatively different because it depends on the experience and knowledge of the subject about many/various things. The wider the experience and knowledge of the issue, the more likely it is to read the aesthetic object and vice versa.

Perhaps studies in various perspectives that highlight the character of visual artists have existed before. However, not many artists (especially Acehnese), especially Permadi's class, have tried to be studied in depth. This research is undoubtedly crucial because the name Permadi is equal to the names of other great Indonesian painters. The spirit of Permadi's struggle for independence, seen through his visual works, can refer to the view. According to (Soedarso, 2000), work is born not because it is driven by the desire to meet the most basic human needs but by spiritual needs to complete and perfect the degree of humanity.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses qualitative research, namely research that intends to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by the research subject, such as behaviour, perception, motivation, action, etc. (Moleong, 2021). The researcher then focused on autobiographical research because this study focused on the actor's object to be analysed to read the traces of the researcher's life; in this autobiographical study, the process is closely related to the researcher's personality. Since this definition covers a wide variety of social aspects, the researcher narrowed this research to this. Researchers are directly involved in conducting an exploration of their experience and understanding.

Techniques used in qualitative research for gathering data include words, actions, written data sources, photos, and statistics (Moleong, 2021). In this study, data collection was carried out through writing related to his life experiences and collecting supporting documents. The data analysis technique previously disclosed is collecting experience stories than telling and rewriting the stories.

In conducting qualitative research, data quality should be emphasised (Soedarsono, 2001). A researcher must observe the data and analyse it. Data may consist of various forms, including recorded writings or lectures, data from observations, news related to research discussions in newspapers, and so on. According to Pertti Alasuutari (in Soedarsono, 2001), One of the characteristics of qualitative data is that it is data that has rich, multi-dimensional, and complex content. In this context, audio-visual recordings are needed in conducting research. Based on the explanation above, collecting and considering the quality of data from various sources will help to find what Alasuutari calls the 'puzzle' or 'mystery' contained in each data collected to answer the posed research questions.

This study collects data from various sources, such as the Takengon painting artist and those who have access to information in terms of knowledge and experience with

Permadi Lyosta as an artist. The primary data in this study are works of art from Permadi Lyosta. In contrast, the supporting data are answers received during interviews, recorded interviews, photo documentation, or newspaper clippings in the form of exhibition reviews to support particular arguments (Stokes, 2007).

Data is also collected by conducting a literature study to support the data's authenticity and validity in reading things the researcher missed. The goal of the literature review is to examine information about the research topics found in various media, including books (ebooks), journals, articles, and essays. And data sources such as the internet, which provides websites, encyclopedias, and the like, can support the analysis process (Stokes, 2007).

The interview method was used to collect data in this study. Planned and unplanned interviews are the other two variations of the interview technique (Danandjaja, 1988). The planned interview started with questions initially prepared for each informant to find out the general view of the community's social conditions with the mural art in their midst. Meanwhile, unplanned interviews are spontaneous, unprepared, or in other words, unintentional. Information received from potential informants will be selected. Before the selection process, informants will be allowed to share their knowledge and experience while getting to know Permadi Lyosta.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As stated earlier, this research aims to discover the aesthetics that Permadi Lyosta offers through her works. The research team initially needed to gather all of Permadi's paintings dating back to the 1940s. He was noted as having only recently learnt to paint and working on several projects at Medan's cliché factory (film negative). According to the information obtained here also, Permadi was given the name Permadi Lyosta by his friend, whose real name is Berahi.

From this information, an assumption arose as to why Permadi used that name until the end of his life. First, the name Berahi does not reflect the area of origin or the Permadi tribe, for example, as are the terms of the Batak people whose clans are behind them; Sitompul, Panjaitan, Hutabarat, Silalahi, etc. Likewise, some Minangkabau people embed tribal names behind their names, such as Koto, Piliang, Bodi, Chaniago, Kampai, etc. In addition to the first and second reasons, his real name seems vulgar when heard. Perhaps Permadi may have deliberately changed his name to avoid his name, which might be the subject of ridicule by his colleagues, especially if he wants to migrate to other areas (Java Island). Meet new people and new friends there. The intention may not be because of shame but only limited to guarding.

Furthermore, Permadi joined Pelukis Rakyat to Lekra in the middle of the 1950s and early 1960s. The Lekra was considered "another version" of the PKI, Partai Komunis Indonesia (also known as the *underbouw* PKI). Still, many Lekra leaders denied that their party was founded on the PKI. According to Basuki Resobowo, the opinion that separates Lekra and the PKI only circulates among the Lekra elite. The lower classes consider Lekra to be PKI (Tempo, 2014).

Then, from the mid-1960s until the early 1980s, Permadi spent almost 12 years in exile on Buru Island due to his membership in Lekra, which the New Order regime claimed also affiliated with the PKI. Only because of that accusation was he entangled on the island of Buru for more than a decade. According to information from sources (interview with Kamar Agam, a Gayo artist who was quite close to Permadi before his death, 2022), Permadi was only released in 1978. After that, he lived a nomadic life but was still within the scope of the island of Java.

Regarding the survey carried out, especially in the village of Permadi itself, the writers found data in the form of a catalogue of a solo exhibition of Permadi's paintings held in 2007, photo albums, and information from close relatives or family. The photo album contains captures of various events starting from when Permadi was young, studying in China and exhibiting in several European countries, besides sitting around chatting with his comrades in arms.

In the album, what we found was no less critical, of course, of Permadi's works. It is suspected that more than thirty works still exist and are stored at his residence in Jakarta. This assumption is entirely accurate because, first, The existence of these works has been confirmed by Permadi's nephew, who occupied Permadi's house before and after his death. Unfortunately, due to the limited distance, it is not yet sure whether Permadi's works are currently in good condition or not.

Second, not only getting information about the existence of Permadi's works, but his nephew also sent some of Permadi's pieces hung on the house's walls. Some look framed while others don't. These works should receive good attention because these works are one of the historical heritages of traces of modern art in Indonesia, a matter that the Takengon community, in particular, should be proud of.



Fig 1. Hatmi Negria Taruan, Permadi Lyosta, and Kamaruzzaman; also called Kamar Agam (source: ddocumentation of Hatmi Negria Taruan, December 23, 2020)

During the New Order regime, in 1980, Permadi settled in Jakarta. Nothing recorded in any sources — as far as the research team is concerned — says Permadi has also moved from Jakarta. Except in 2018, Permadi returned to Takengon (his hometown) to undergo treatment there. After experiencing several years of therapy in his hometown, Permadi died and was buried in the Gampong (village) where he was born.

According to Permadi's nephew (Abdul Hamid, 62 years old), during his struggles and gambles with various complicated conditions to stay alive and be able to paint, to this day, Permadi's footsteps are unknown to his family village people, and the Acehnese people in general. Aceh has prominent figures and personages in the field of visual arts after Indonesia's independence which may be challenging to find/reborn even in a century. If such a claim is not an exaggeration because it is not only measured by the intensity of painting but also the ideology, attitude, stance, etc., which may not even be found in visual artists (especially Aceh) today (interview with L.K. Ara).

The practical intensity, ideology, application of attitude, and actions make him a great person – an artist with a life at stake. Because for Permadi, it is understood from various available sources that painting is not only a matter of the painter with his paints and canvases, but how he understands, interprets, and then lives a life that is expressed through his paintings. This principle is also in line with what Sudjojono believed in his creative process, namely calling for the importance of Nationalism, even though its disclosures were international (Taruan & Susandro, 2021).

Through his paintings, Permadi not only displays sensory captures (eyes), which are reinterpreted by his feelings (other than by thoughts) but also implies traces of his struggles and what is at stake. Then, what if Aceh's artists are at stake today? Is painting just a matter between himself, brush, paint, and canvas, without any stakes (ideology) along the way?

V. AESTHETICS OF PERMADI LYOSTA

As described above, the creative process of Permadi and other painting artists (as aesthetic subjects) goes hand in hand with the struggles of the Indonesian people. They were hunted here and there, restrained, and so on. The only thing that came to mind was a place to get protection and not to be killed in the middle of nowhere. During such conditions, it is impossible to store all the works that have been worked on properly. Therefore, not many of his works have been saved, especially those born in the Old and New Order regimes. Of thirty pieces mentioned earlier, almost were done in the post-New Order era, as shown in the pictures attached below, even if it is found that works that were worked on during the Old Order and New Order eras can only be counted on the fingers.

The following are some works (aesthetic objects) selected from dozens of other pieces later attached to the Permadi solo painting exhibition catalogue in 2007. The pictures below are artworks in the catalogue and are intentionally displayed as a reminder these paintings still exist today.



Fig 2. *Potret Diri* (Self Portrait) Permadi Lyosta (source: *screenshot* Permadi solo exhibition catalogue 2007)

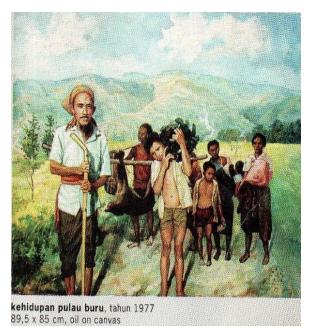


Fig 3. Portrait of community life in Buru Island (source: *screenshot* Permadi solo exhibition catalogue 2007)

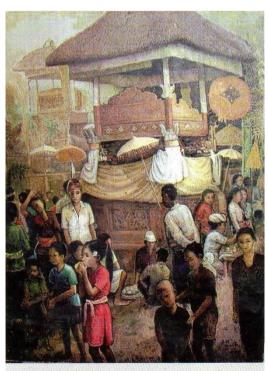


Fig 4. Estimated work after being released from Buru Island (source: *screenshot* Permadi solo exhibition catalogue 2007)



laut tawar-gayo, tahun 1995 70 x 54 cm, oil on canvas

Fig 5. Lut Tawar Lake, work on during the New Order Regime (source: *screenshot* Permadi solo exhibition catalogue 2007)



bermain didepan pura, tahun 2000 70 x 54,5 cm, oil on canvas

Fig 6. Portrait of the celebration day of the Balinese ethnic community (source: *screenshot* Permadi solo exhibition catalogue 2007)

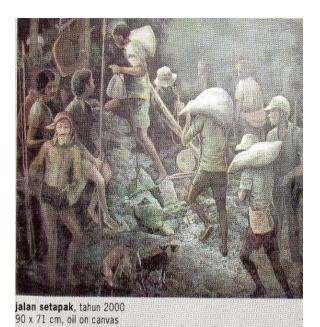
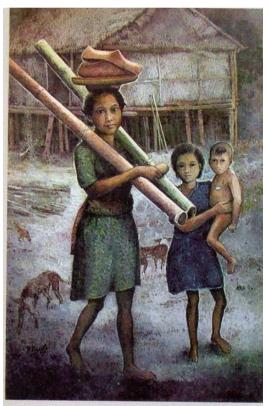


Fig 7. Times of forced labour on Buru Island (source: *screenshot* Permadi solo exhibition catalogue 2007)



ngambil air, tahun 2000 90 x 60 cm, oil on canvas

Fig 8. It is estimated that the painting depicts a fragment of the activities of mothers and children on Buru Island (source: *screenshot* Permadi solo exhibition catalogue 2007)

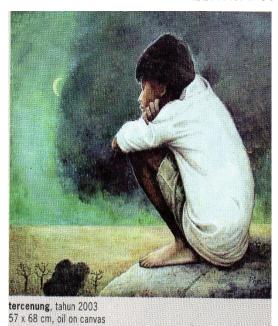
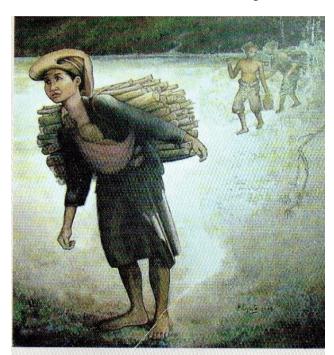


Fig 9. A teenager who is contemplating alone (source: *screenshot* Permadi solo exhibition catalogue 2007)

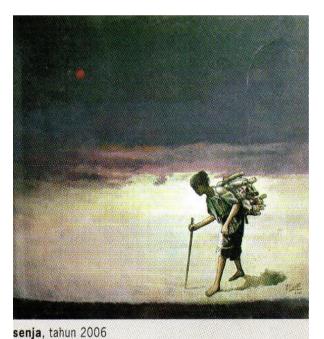


berutem, tahun 2004 70 x 80 cm, oil on canvas

Fig 10. One of the daily activities of mothers and fathers on Buru Island (source: *screenshot* Permadi solo exhibition catalogue 2007)



Fig 11. One of Permadi's paintings with Balinese female figures (source: *screenshot* Permadi solo exhibition catalogue 2007)



89 x 80 cm, oil on canvas Fig 12. "Senja" (Dusk), a met

Fig 12. "Senja" (Dusk), a metaphorical title/painting full of meaning that seems to imply a painter; Lyosta Permadi (source: screenshot Permadi solo exhibition catalogue 2007)



Fig 13. Portrait of someone on Buru Island (source: *screenshot* Permadi solo exhibition catalogue 2007)

From the observations made, referring to various literary sources and several sources, the authors found almost no statements explaining the style or technique commonly applied by Permadi (as an aesthetic subject) – seen in his works. However, the similarities found in all sources above depict that Permadi deliberately did not emphasise specific techniques in his paintings. This technique later became his trademark, like some other great painters, but merely described his sensory perception (aesthetic value) when experiencing, witnessing/enjoying something; either a natural landscape, a particular event, a specific subject, humans and animals, etc. Instead of emphasising Permadi's Ego in his work, an effort to do things differently to want to stand out among other artists. On the contrary, his artworks reflect his humble self, a form of love for life, humanity, and homeland.

Although no selfish tendency is emphasised in his works, it does not mean that none of Permadi's works is masterpieces – one or two of his dozens of other works. In an incidental interview, Rika Wirandi, a research team participant with an informant from Bali named I Wayan Setem, who is the coordinator of the fine arts study program at ISI Denpasar and was on duty (office service) at ISBI Aceh, stated that Permadi's most significant work is a painting titled "Jalan Setapak" (The Footsteps) (see figure 7). After the informant saw the entire picture, he only mentioned thus the title and made no mention of or pointed at any other artworks that, in his knowledge, were likewise regarded as masterpieces. Therefore, the authors assumed for a while that it was Permadi's only masterpiece.

Judging from the year "Jalan Setapak" (The Footsteps) was made in 2000. Instead of making a painting that reflected the issues or events that year, Permadi made a painting depicting the forced labour that he and other prisoners endured while detained on the island of Buru. A trace of the bitter experience of his life in the past that was not easy would not even be possible to disappear from his memory.

In the painting "Jalan Setapak" (The Footsteps), there are several human and animal figures; eleven humans and two dogs. Although the number of figures in the painting can be counted on the fingers, it seems as if Permadi aims to lead the viewer's imagination to imagine the broad picture that tens or maybe hundreds of people are doing the same job.

From the figures, we can see that three people are carrying sacks (containing rice or other things), and one is holding a carrier in his left hand. Meanwhile, the other five people were standing (except one person sitting cross-legged) while observing people carrying sacks and their surroundings. Three of them held spears, one was unarmed, and the other had a rifle hanging from his arm. The other three of the eleven were mentioned at the outset, and it was not clear what they were doing. However, it can be assumed that they are workers or perhaps foremen.

Suppose we look closely at Permadi's works by year. In that case, we can also find a coherent flow of events, for example, telling the story of his migration from his hometown to various cities on the island of Java and then back to his hometown. But what can be captured is a piece of his journey, starting when he was in the sea, Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Bali, and when he was exiled on Buru Island until he returned to his hometown.

In addition to the depiction of Permadi's "journey" from time to time, which seems entirely coherent from his works, several themes can also be embedded/compiled, including 1) forced labour on the island of Buru; there are three matching paintings, 2) the ethnography of the island of Buru; two matching paintings, 3) Bali; there are four matching paintings, 4) Gayo; there are three matching paintings, 5) Balinese market landscape; there are four matching paintings, 6) women; three matching paintings, 7) leaving Buru Island; five matching paintings and 8) hometown; two similar paintings, one painting of freshwater lake and the other a painting of a horse figure standing proudly on a hill with a background of the freshwater lake; it is estimated that this painting was done in the 80s, only a few years after Permadi was released from Buru Island.

This horse figure painting is as if (a symbol) the end of Permadi's journey after being overseas. The choice of this figure is certainly not a coincidence, considering that Permadi has also been educated in China. Because for the Chinese themselves, horses have been mythical since time centuries old (T, 2004). Then Dermawan explained that horses, in any situation, always bring profit. Horses are understood in a positive context as a symbol of hard work, speed, and ferocity. This positive meaning is often heard in the expression, "if the horse arrives, then everything will be successful/finished".

The horse symbolises bravery, strength, and clarity of purpose. Even the horse symbol was widely developed in Central Asia before Western art explored it.



Fig 14. A metaphorical painting, as if implying a figure who has been crisscrossed overseas and then returns home full of pride (source: *screenshot* Permadi solo exhibition catalogue 2007)

From the explanation above, based on the notion of aesthetics, which is the sensory perception of the aesthetic subject towards the aesthetic object to produce aesthetic value, it is clear that Permadi relies on all of his ideas, especially on the spirit of struggle. In other words, there is a stake in the process of his work; empathy is embedded in it. The gamble became a force that was able to push him, not just to paint. But also fighting for a sense of love for human values through his paintings, a kind of ideology that has been ingrained. Perhaps it is also relevant to call his spirit socialist realism, revolutionary realism, or other names commensurate with his artistic spirit. Embedding the word realism indicates a spirit of struggle that cannot be separated from reality, especially for the little people. Because "realism" always implies the intention of bringing the truth to many people and thus hoping to change people's lives (Mohamad, 2011).

Finally, the aesthetics of Permadi's works are not impossible to understand. However, it is impossible to look at his works without exploring the ideas behind them. Not only ideas that motivated him personally and as a critical Lekra figure, but also ideas that encouraged several political institutions and movements that were rampant during the Old Order era, such as the PKI and other leftist organisations or associated with other leftists. The idea in question is Marxism, which broadly aims to eliminate "class" in the social order. Owners of capital and labourers/workers should get commensurate rights without any capital (profit) inequality. However, it is not enough to refer to the initial ideas that became the driving force of leftist movements or those associated with the left. It is also necessary to explore how Karl Marx's thoughts developed from Lenin, Stalin, Leon Trotsky, Mao Zedong, Tan Malaka, and D.N. Aidit. Because

the development of Karl Marx's statements did not go as planned initially. During his journey, there are interpretations and how to adopt his ideas in the form of practice by each group in a nation as adherents. Like Lekra, in 1955, it reformulated its cultural ideology to be less political and more idealistic. The elements of culture remain the same, namely Nationalism and anti-imperialism (Foulcher, 2020).

VI. CONCLUSION

Permadi is not just a painter and painting but a warrior who struggles with pictures. Struggles based on human values elevate human status to achieve true wholeness. Until the end of his life, by walking briskly under the support of one of the Takengon (Kamar Agam) artists, Permadi insisted on meeting with local officials, expressing his hope that he would be willing to create cultural arts education spaces for the younger generation of the nation's successors, especially the Takengon youth generation, Central Aceh.

Whether Permadi's wishes come true or if it ends up being "as usual," Permadi's efforts are unquestionably admirable and deserving of praise. A kind of hard slap on anyone in authority to always fight for good things that benefit the public. Permadi's actions signify consistency, integrity, and loyalty in understanding something (which he thinks is good) and how it is applied in the form of attitudes and actions. Aesthetic value (of reality) is perhaps not enough to just be followed by the word socialist or revolutionary behind it, but a humanist.

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INFORMANTS

- [1.] Kamar Agam (44 years old, a painter from Takengon, Central Aceh)
- [2.] Abdul Hamid (62 years old, Nephew of Permadi Lyosta)
- [3.] L.K. Ara (80 years old, a painter from Takengon, Central Aceh)