



Installation view of A.D. Pirous: *Spiritual Calligraphy* exhibition

# ARTISTIC Maestros

DEBORAH ISKANDAR EXAMINES THE LIVES AND WORKS OF INDONESIA'S MOST INFLUENTIAL ARTISTS



A.D. Pirous in front of one of his paintings at the *Spiritual Calligraphy* exhibition, "Kurnia-Nya yang Mana yang Masih Kau Dustakan? / Then Which of The Favours of Your God Will You Deny?"

The opening of the National Gallery in Singapore at the end of 2015 highlights the importance of documenting the history of modern art in Asia. While each country has its own journey to contemporary art, we have to look to the past, to appreciate the future. Recent exhibitions of two of Indonesia's most important maestros, A.D. Pirous and Srihadi Soedarsono, show the similarities of thinking but yet the divergent artistic paths of these great artists.

A.D. Pirous: *Spiritual Calligraphy* opened on 1st March 2016 at the World Trade Centre Complex, Jakarta. Sponsored by PT. Jakarta Land and curated by ISA Art Advisory, the exhibition aims to bring art to public spaces for the first time for Jakartans who don't have time to visit museums or galleries. *Spiritual Calligraphy* is a selected retrospective by the pioneer of Indonesian abstract and calligraphy art, Abdul Djalil Pirous. Highlighting the painter's signature style, you can see the transition of

his work that fuses Western abstraction with calligraphy. Spanning four decades from the 1970s to the 2000s, the works showcased in the exhibition illustrate the development of Pirous' oeuvre in the history of art.

A.D. Pirous was born in Aceh in 1932 to a large and relatively well-off family. After travelling to Medan for his high school education, his talent as an artist was recognised and he was encouraged to pursue an art education by en-

rolling in the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB). As a child, Pirous studied Arabic calligraphy and Koranic verses. But it was a visit to the United States in the 1970s where he found the answer to his life question, his identity as an Indonesian artist. It was at an exhibition in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York that he encountered traditional and modern Islamic art from the Middle East and North Africa. This exhibition brought back memories of his childhood in Aceh. After that moment of enlightenment, Pirous focused on pursuing calligraphy and abstraction as a form of modern art, which marked a turning point in his artistic career.

In one of the highlights of the exhibition "Dia Yang Menyentuh Langit dan Dia Yang Menyentuh Bumi / He Who Touches the Sky and He Who Touches the Earth" exudes a poetic sense of spirituality produced by the gold axis that divides the canvas. The gold axis, executed in a strong abstract manner, is an element derived from Arabic calligraphy. In "Tuntutlah Ilmu Walau ke Negeri Cina! IIA / Seek Knowledge Even to China! IIA", you can see how Pirous is able to create a harmonious unification out of several different calligraphies, from Chinese, Korean to Arabic. After years spent in America, the importance of looking to the East for answers rather than slavishly copying the West is clearly evident through this painting. Walking through the years of his artistic journey, we experience how Pirous uses his art as a vehicle to capture the spirituality of civilization while at the same time reflecting his ongoing journey of self-discovery.

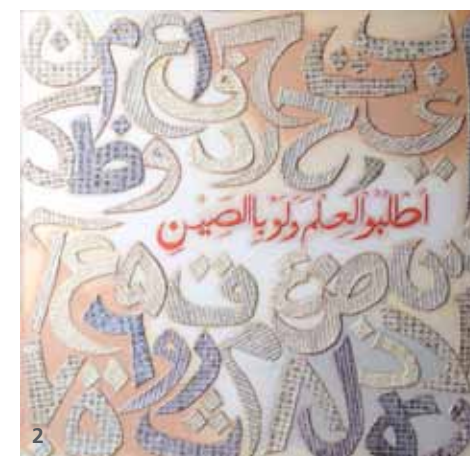
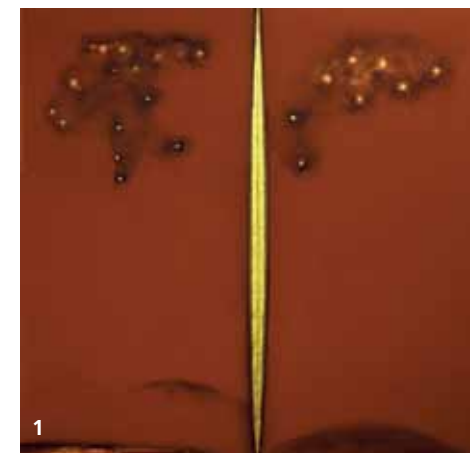
This public bearing of an artist's soul was also recently captured in the sublime exhibition of Srihadi Soedarsono's works in *70 Tahun Rentang Kembara Roso / Srihadi Soedarsono: 70 Years Journey of Roso / Srihadi Soedarsono* presented by Galeri Nasional. In the book "The Path to the Soul", Srihadi explains that the concept of "roso" to the Javanese is not merely a "feeling" or "rasa" but an embodiment of our soul. Similarly, it was also an extended stay in the United States in the 1960s where Srihadi became acutely aware of his Asian identity and the role that "rasa" plays in his paintings. Primarily known for his recent paintings of Indonesian dancers, the "roso" exhibition presented Srihadi's early works on paper that have never been exhibited in public. Consisting of more than 450 sketches, drawings, and watercolours on paper as well as seven oil paintings, we can see the artistic journey Srihadi began as a young boy and the role of spirituality in his life that has been embodied his oeuvre. "Rasa" (or "Roso" in Javanese spelling) is a deciding factor in Srihadi's works that built his sensitiv-



Mr. Will Bright (General Manager of PT Jakarta Land); Deborah Iskandar (Principal of ISA Art Advisory); Mr. A.D. Pirous; Mr. Triawan Munaf (Chairman of Indonesian Agency for Creative Economy); Mr. Robert Blake (USA Ambassador to Indonesia)



Srihadi Soedarsono's signature *Dancers* painting; Oil on canvas; 135 x 225 cm



ity to the basic values of Javanese culture, the values of life, and the principles of beauty.

One can see from these exhibitions that these two Maestros have many similarities in upbringing, inspiration and education but developed artistically in completely different ways. Still, the main theme of Asian identity and spirituality is evident in their work, and it is this element that gives the viewer pleasure and elevates both of them as "Maestros of Indonesian Art". Through such retrospectives, future generations of Indonesian artists can reflect on the journey of the country's pioneers and forge a new national identity for Indonesian contemporary art.

A.D. Pirous: *Spiritual Calligraphy* was open to the public and ran until 1st April 2016 at the World Trade Centre Building 2 Lobby, WTC Complex, Jl. Jend. Sudirman Kav 29-31. For enquiries please contact [www.isaartadvisory.com](http://www.isaartadvisory.com).

1. A.D. Pirous; *Dia Yang Menyentuh Langit dan Dia Yang Menyentuh Bumi / He Who Touches the Sky and He Who Touches the Earth* (2007); marble paste, gold leaf, acrylic on canvas; 150 x 145 cm
2. A.D. Pirous; *Tuntutlah Ilmu Walau ke Negeri Cina! IIA / Seek Knowledge Even though to China! IIA* (2007); marble paste, acrylic on canvas; 120 x 120 cm

All Images Courtesy of ISA Art Advisory