

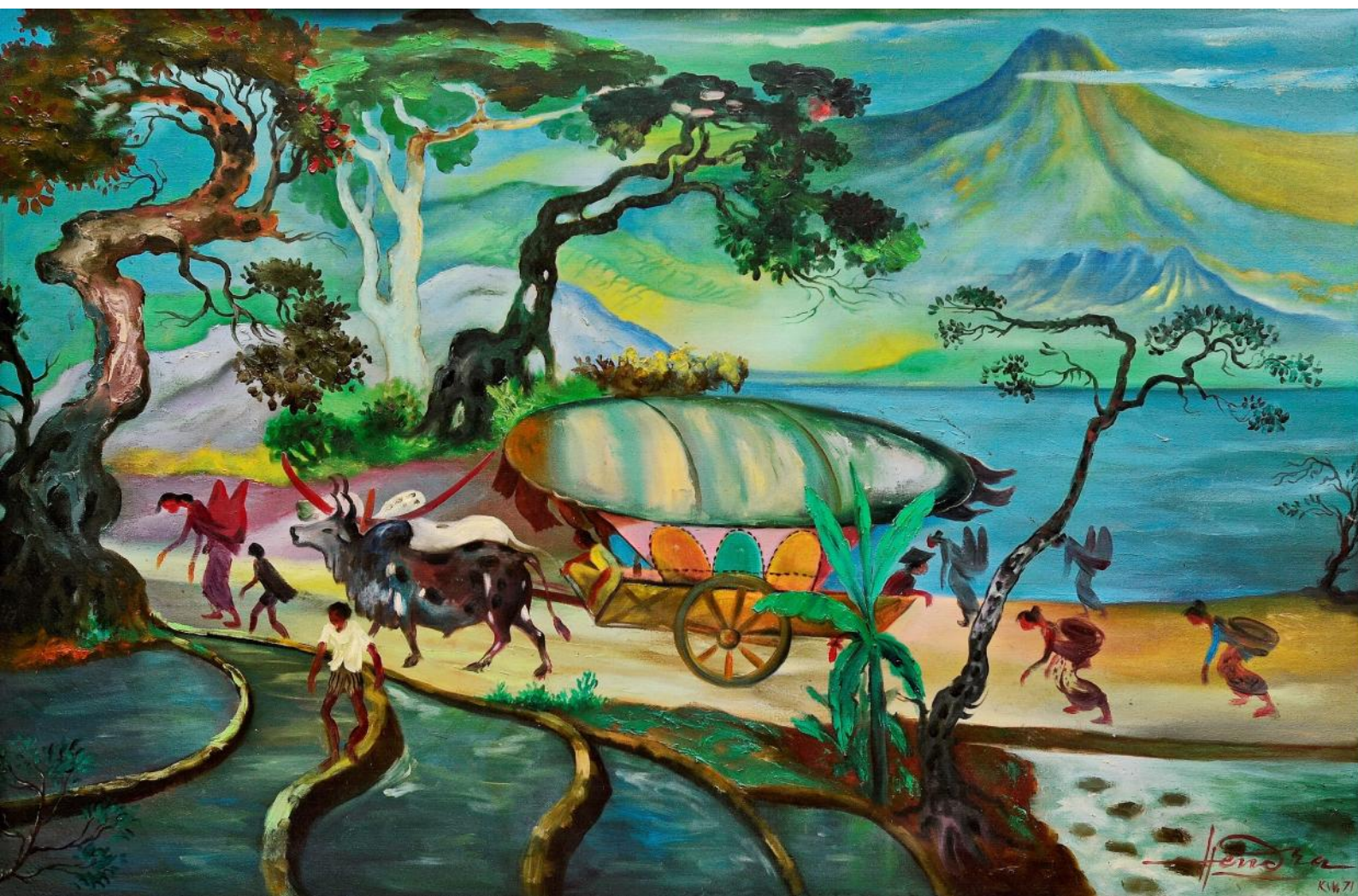
Research & Essay Report

Artist : Hendra Gunawan (1918 – 1983)
Medium : Oil on canvas
Signature : Hendra and KW 71
Height : +/- 78 cm

Width : +/- 118 cm
Period/Date : 1971
Country : Indonesia
Condition : Good

TITLE:

Cattle-Cart and Women Convoy in Landscape





RESEARCH & ESSAY

Born to Raden Prawiranegara and Raden Odah Tejaningsih on June 11th 1918 in Bandung – West Java, Dutch East Indies, Hendra Gunawan was famously recognized for his caricaturist, colorful style of painting that draws on an Expressionist background. In 1935, together with his close friends, Sudarso (1914 – 2006) and Barli Sasmitawinata (1921 –), Hendra joined with other Indonesian maestros as his teachers to establish a community of painters named “Kelompok



Fig. 1

Lima” (Group Five) in Bandung. The name “Kelompok Lima” was famously recognized for its five members passionately traveling around Indonesia to paint together. The members of five painters were Affandi, Barli, Hendra Gunawan,

Sudarso, and Wahdi. In 1938 Hendra Gunawan began to learn himself sculpting. Thus, during his youth, he studied and explored a lot of facet of Indonesian painters at the time such as the expressionist Affandi (1907 - 1990) and the landscape—panoramic painter Wahidi Sunanta.

In 1938 Hendra Gunawan (1918-1983) actively guided and taught the youths of Indonesia who were passionate in learning the arts of painting and sculpting, and he also organized art and cultural events at Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (PUTERA) under the leadership of three Indonesian national figures and heroes known as Tiga Serangkai: Soekarno, Moh. Hatta, and K.H. Mas Mansyur. He was a lecturer at the Indonesian Fine Art Academy (ASRI) in Yogyakarta in 1957. At the same time,

Hendra Gunawan also involved in the establishment of LEKRA (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat) or People's Institution of Culture. LEKRA was immensely associated to ideology of PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia) or Indonesian Communist Party. After only eight years of his activity in LEKRA, the bloody massacre of 10th September 1965 movement imploded upon his country – Indonesia inflicting he was imprisoned in 1965 after the banned PKI party was accused to be a party on coup attempt against Soekarno's government.

Hendra Gunawan was imprisoned in jail, located in Kebon Waru – Bandung – West Java and the artist was incarcerated from 1965–1978. During passing his life in the prison, he kept on painting and creating his works by using the rough canvases with subjects reflecting the lower-class society's struggle, patience for a harmonized family, and other social life's activities. His oeuvres executed in behind the prison were mostly signed with his typical name's signature, date of creation with a mark "KW" as an acronym of Kebun Waru, the name of the prison house where the artist passed his life at that time.

Entitled to "Iring-iringan Cikar dan Wanita di Pemandangan" or in English "Cattle-



Fig. 2

Cart and Women Convoy in Landscape", the present painting was painted by Hendra Gunawan in 1971 in Kebun Waru prison before the artist was released from prison in 1978. The subject is painted in rich and vibrant hues with tranquil blues and greenish landscape in the background. Using

the rough canvas painted in lively flowing brushstrokes, the artist applied a vibrant color palette providing the scene with a vibrating sense of movement. His oeuvre, the present painting style, was successfully executed in European techniques and romanticism with traditional Indonesian aesthetics expressing the patriotism and cultural heritage of villagers in exotic Indonesia's rustic village. The subject on the present painting is a narrative theme that was inspired by his own philosophical aspiration and the facts of his life on the lower-class folks' life in a rustic village with mountainous landscape in Bandung, West Java.

Hendra Gunawan captured a cattle-cart and its passengers in traveling that is placed as the main subject on the present painting while the women walking along are selected as its complementary. Cattle-cart is a wooden traditional Javanese vehicle pulled by cows, and the vehicle is so called “cikar”. The cattle-cart is equipped with a colorful wooden shelter and two wheels consisting of wooden transverse rubber connected with a cart are pulled by two different cows. Two



Fig. 3

dappled and white cows pulling the cart are depicted in running quite slowly in rhythm with women’s footsteps walking along. As a devotee of left-wing party’s ideology, Indonesian Communist Party or PKI, Hendra Gunawan conveys on the philosophical meaning of cattle-cart’s wheel for Javanese people. In Javanese

philosophy, life is like a cart wheel, spinning and going forward, tracing the route of life’s journey to the desired destination. Like the rotation of cart’s wheels, sometimes man’s life is atop sometimes also at down. Also, like a plodding cattle-cart, people striding the journey of their life should be slowly but surely to assure their salvation and conviction to achieve their goals.

Hendra compounds the women as complementary of subject on the present painting. The subject represents everyday scenes consisting of dynamic women engaging in unpretentious activity but it demands the endeavors and immolation. Depicting and composing in melodious composition between women walking on foot in rhythm with the cattle-cart’s wheel rotation, Hendra Gunawan found a deep affinity with the working-class villagers in his country at that time. The subject reveals the women’s resilience going to trade to the market by walking down the mountainside, watery rice field and sea shaded by lush foliage with grooved trees in the morning. The women are depicted in carrying the bamboo-made baskets containing their commodities such as vegetables or fruits and the baskets are carried and tied with shawls on their backs. As an advocate of leftist party, PKI, the artist illustrated the women villagers as the lower working-class society in struggling and draining sweats to earn wealth for the sake of their family that was synergetic rapport with his native land. The artist composes the women in figurative style passing a burden of life to make a decent living in the

morning. They are depicted in walking by stoop uniquely in resemblance of the horde of grasshopper gloriously crawling and searching their prey at dawn.

Hendra Gunawan frequently elevates panoramic landscape and villagers on his oeuvres with various style and decorative elements. A similar theme to the present paintings but in different decorative elements and compositions is from Ir. Ciputra Private Collections, entitled “Pantai dan Gerobak” or “Beach and Cart”, painted in 1974 (90 x 195 cm in size), illustrated in Hendra Gunawan, A Great Modern Indonesian Painter, Ir. Ciputra Private Collections, Agus Dermawan T, Ciputra Artpreneur, Jakarta, 2015, p. 103 (see, fig. 1).

As the most unforgettable and iconic Indonesian maestro-painter in the



Fig. 4

20th century, the demand for Hendra Gunawan’s oeuvres have blossomed and taken hold over the last decade. Compare to similar rhythm composition, content and elements on Hendra’s painting entitled to “Coastal Landscape with

Mountain”, signed 'Hendra' but without the date, sold at Christie’s Hong Kong, 25th November 2012, lot. 157 (size: 100 x 155 cm), initially estimated US\$70,950 - US\$90,300 (HKD 550,000 - HKD 700,000), and sold for US\$70,950 (HKD 550,000), excluding the buyer’s premium (see fig. 2). Compared to present piece, the Christie’s piece is painted in slightly more blue hues of mountain, inscribed ‘Hendra’ but without date of execution. The value of Hendra’s artworks depicting villagers on the landscape subjects has been regularly rising in the market and achieved high prices at auction until today. For example, Hendra Gunawan’s painting entitled to ‘Landscape’ was sold at Sotheby’s Hong Kong, 4th April 2011, Lot 350 (size: 150 x 220 cm) signed and painted KW 1976, for HK\$3,620,000 or equivalent to USD 465,822 (see fig. 3). Another entitled to “Landscape” depicting a rural people and buffaloes in landscape, signed in 1978 was sold at Sotheby’s Hong Kong, 4th April 2016, lot. 376 (size: 150 x 300 cm), initially estimated HK\$2,000,000 – HK\$3,000,000, for HK\$7,520,000 or equivalent to US\$969,328 (see fig. 4). In creating a sense of movement within his paintings, Hendra Gunawan regularly painted the repetition of subjects on his artworks.