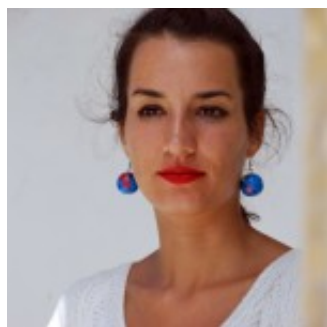


## Eddie Hara: the Punk Uncle of Indonesian Contemporary Art | COBO Social



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Indonesian artist Eddie Hara, also dubbed as the "uncle" for young artists in the country.

Everyone has an uncle who is a bit off-the-wall. For young Indonesian artists, this uncle is Eddie Hara.

It's not surprising to run into the Salatiga-born, Basel-based artist both at international art fairs – at Art Stage Singapore he is represented by Semarang Gallery and Nadi Gallery – as well as in graffiti-covered alleyways, hanging out with comic book artists. Eddie is the incarnation of the highbrow-lowbrow aesthetic which is a trademark of contemporary art in Indonesia.

TEXT : Naima Morelli

PHOTOS : Courtesy of Eddie Hara, Semarang Gallery & Nadi Gallery

At the beginning of his career, the fact that Eddie Hara's art did not appear "ethnically" Indonesian baffled collectors looking for the exotic. Eddie was happy to contradict all expectations by painting outlandish creatures that owed more to pop culture than his Javanese heritage.

Time has proved him right. Eddie Hara is today known first and foremost in the art world for the irreverence and playfulness of his work (not to speak of his trendy colourful outfits). For him, entertainment and fun are important aspects of art, as they have the power to lift the viewer from his daily preoccupations.



Eddie HARA, Painting is Believing, 150 x 200 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2015

### Was there a precise moment when you decided you wanted to become an artist?

I have been always interested in art – since I was in primary school and throughout high school, where I was painting as an extra-curricular activity. My interest kept growing as I got older, especially in oil painting. But my father was really against the idea of my becoming an artist. He saw it as a waste of time. But in the end we reconciled. I was glad, because it really told me that this was the path I had to take.

**In the '80s in Yogyakarta you were at school with Heri Dono, Mella Jaarsma and Nindityo Adipurnomo, now artists celebrated both in Indonesia and abroad. How was the atmosphere at art school back then?**

That's true, Heri Dono and I used to do our homework together. In school the tendency was to play safe and opt for a more naturalistic, decorative, expressionist or abstract style. Everybody was all about ochre and earth colours. Heri Dono and I didn't really follow that. We created our own thing. For the time, our art was too wild, too colourful.

**So back then there was already the seed of the work you're doing now...**

Yes, I have always been against the mainstream. I was studying children's art. The way I personally came into contact with Western art for the first time was through a woman who came to an exhibition I was holding in school for an exam. At the time I was young, into hard rock – I had long hair and biker boots. She wanted to buy everything, but I told her the paintings were not for sale. I said she could take one painting from the corner, perhaps. She was from Zurich and invited me to join her for a few months. It was '84 and that was my first trip to Europe.



Eddie haRA, The Revolution Starts from Here, 150 x 150 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2014

**How was your first encounter with Europe?**

I was wide open to learn. I had always dreamt of going overseas, but I could never have imagined it would be to Switzerland. I didn't know much about it – just the watches, the cows and the chocolate [laughs]. During my time there, I visited all the museums and came into contact with Fluxus, Beyus, Duchamp, Dada and Surrealism. I was seeing in person all the works I could only see in catalogues in Yogyakarta.

**What did you bring home to Yogyakarta and to your own art practice?**

After I came back from Switzerland, I started studying Modernism a bit and experimenting. I was influenced by art history and by all the movements which were springing up at that particular time, such as Transavanguardia in Italy, the New Wild in Germany, Robert Combas in France and many others. What I was also interested in was this kind of neo-primitivism: reproducing nature in a way that was aggressive, pure and raw.

**When you decided to base yourself in Basel, Switzerland, you had already had a few shows both in Indonesia and Europe. How did you decide to build your career at that point?**

Moving to Basel was a tough decision to make, especially at the time when I was starting to make a career in Indonesia. It sure wasn't easy to have one foot in Europe and another in Indonesia, but it's paid off in the long-term. Today I feel like I have two homes.



Eddie HARA, Do You Like My Kinky Underwear? (We Don't Need Another Hero), 150x200cm, Acrylic on Canvas, 2014

**You have many followers among up-and-coming Indonesian artists. What do you think about the new generation?**

I think they are good and definitely aggressive. I'm glad that they still take us as a point of reference. It's us Indonesian artists from the '80s who were really global and actually started to open the doors to the outer world. I went to Switzerland and Holland, Heri Dono to Switzerland, Nindityo and Agus Suwage to Holland and Arahmaiani went to Australia. The previous FX Harsono generation, the New Art Movement, was much more local. I feel the '80s were important so on many levels, not only in the arts.

**What are your painting habits? Do you paint every day?**

Yes, I work every day. I have to discipline myself, especially as a family man. So I go to the studio from 10 am to 4 pm. The drawing part is central to my paintings. It's my laboratory. I doodle a lot, and then I choose the best drawings and transfer them to the canvas.

**Comics and street art are also a big influence on your work. What are your favourite comics?**

I like American comics from the '80s and early '90s. Some comic books are not realistic and are closer to visual art than comics in the classical sense. Street art also interests me a lot. All the good street artists have been educated in art academies, which is why all the stickers are very well composed. The boundaries between highbrow and lowbrow are becoming more and more indistinct. Of course I'm more biased toward the lowbrow – although I suspect I'm not that lowbrow anymore *[laughs]*.

#### **About Eddie Hara**

Born in 1957 in Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia, Eddie Hara currently lives and works in Switzerland. Educated in Indonesian Institute of Arts (ISI) Yogyakarta, Indonesia and Akademie voor Beeldende Kunst Enschede (AKI), The Netherlands, Eddie has held numerous solo and group exhibitions in Cuba, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.

Eddie Hara's works are included in the Singapore Art Museum, Museum der Kulturen, Basel, Switzerland, as well as private foundations, corporate and galleries in Indonesia and worldwide.

*Naima Morelli is an arts writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written for ArtsHub, Art Monthly Australia, Art to Part of Culture and Escape Magazine, among others, and she is the author of "Arte Contemporanea in Indonesia, un'introduzione" a book focused on the development of contemporary art in Indonesia. As a curator, her practice revolves around creating meaningful connections between Asia, Europe and Australia.*