

## The Hip Gyration that Set Off Porn Controversy

by T. Sutanto, Bandung | March 18, 2006

One day there was an uproar across the country over the rise of a *dangdut* singer who performed an erotic show called the "drilling dance" (characterized by hip gyrations). The diva was Inul Daratista, a suburban street singer who shot to fame as a national and even international phenomenon. She soon came under the spotlight, with men and women, fans and foes, talking about her. The talk eventually turned into controversy.

Inul's dance not only stirred the sensations of her audiences, but also penetrated the forum of social and political discourse.

Her hip movements continued to rock the stage and shake the media, as well as the House of Representatives, prompting some groups to push for the speedy enforcement of a law against pornography and "pornoaction" (a new term meaning porn-related acts, introduced after the appearance of Inul and her fellow erotic dancers). The impact of Inul's gyrations was tremendous.

Inul's dance sparked various public reactions, ranging from those captivated by its style, praising it as a positive creation, to those condemning it as a corruptor of the nation's morality.

Two of the responses were very interesting and impressive. First, the response of a celebrity known as the "king of *dangdut*", Rhoma Irama, whose speeches and songs have a deep Islamic tone. Second was the reaction of a distinguished ulema, Mustofa Bisri.

Although the two figures in theory have the same religious pursuits and concerns, their responses differed greatly in tone and substance.

Rhoma Irama strongly expressed his displeasure with the performing style of Inul, who apparently would have earned the title "queen of *dangdut*" had it not been for the controversy around her. Only the "king" himself knows whether his fury was based on the appearance of this new rival, or really had to do with his deep spirituality and anxiety over the threat to the morality of the country. He was so enraged that he isolated Inul and worked to derail her *dangdut* career, although this style of music certainly is not the property of any individual or group.

Mustofa Bisri, a prominent Nahdlatul Ulama ulema, and also a poet and a painter, reacted differently. Mustofa, better known as Gus Mus, offered a modest, imaginative and, in my view, amusing and poetic response. What did Gus Mus do amid the debate over Inul's drilling dance?

He did not give a heated comment laden with hatred or anger. He simply created a painting. What did he portray? If I'm not mistaken: Inul performing her sensual dance with a number of

devout Muslims doing *zikir* (chants of verses in praise of God) around her. And what next? The painter's cultural satire went further: he displayed the canvas in a mosque! This move was not appreciated by everybody. A small incident reportedly ensued. [Ed. note: these "incidents" included threats to burn Gus Mus's Islamic boarding school and mosque to the ground.]

What did Gus Mus actually mean? What was he trying to convey through his painting? As a wordless visual piece, it can of course be interpreted in various ways from different viewpoints and perceptions. I have never heard or read an explanation from Gus Mus himself about the meaning and aim of his painting. Therefore, I'm only groping for its positive side.

As a Javanese who has soaked up the culture of *wayang* since childhood, I "see" the meaning of the painting (in fact only through the media) by directly associating it with the depiction of Mintorogo (Arjuna).

This figure represents the personality of Arjuna, a knight in the Mahabharata epic, who meditates with eyes closed, sitting cross-legged in a solemn state, surrounded by beautiful and sensual women in their seductive and enticing poses. But the ascetic sinks deep in meditation, solemnly making inner contact with the Deity, causing the temptresses to flee empty-handed. And Mintorogo eventually receives a valuable reward for his act of self-denial.

By analogy, in the painting by Gus Mus, the meditating Mintorogo is illustrated by the religious devotees engaged in their solemn *zikir*, and the erotic dance Inul performs symbolizes the seduction. Why was it shown in a mosque instead of an art gallery? This is just the true essence of the picture: basically it was not meant as an artistic work. The painting was a visual sermon for the serene and clear reflection of the mosque's assemblies.

It was Gus Mus preaching from his heart through his brush strokes. When I imagine his painting hanging in a mosque, it seems as if I can hear Gus Mus calmly but clearly calling out: "If we are inwardly strong, behave piously and praise God sincerely, we need no law, police, force or prison to make us capable of enjoying inner union with the Supreme Spirit. Temptations need no chasing, no fussing. They are sure to vanish in futility."

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LibForAll advisor Kyai Haji Achmad Mustofa Bisri ("Gus Mus") in his *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in Rembang, Central Java, 2006.

