

work mobilized again in 1990, when Wyeth–Ayerst asked the FDA to approve Premarin for heart disease prevention in women who have had a hysterectomy. Every heart disease prevention drug used by men has been tested in a large randomized trial, the Network argued at a public hearing; by contrast, claims that estrogen replacement promoted heart health in women had never been rigorously tested. Leading researchers, sponsored by Wyeth–Ayerst, countered that a trial of estrogen replacement would not be feasible. The FDA turned down the company's application.

The Woman's Health Initiative clinical trials, funded under Bernadine Healy's leadership at the US National Institutes of Health, grew out of this ruling. The Network lobbied hard to make sure the trial went ahead. The trial's opponents included leading gynecologists, who argued that "the heart disease benefit is so well proven that it would be unethical to ask women to accept the possibility that they might be randomized to a placebo." The rest is history. The Women's Health Initiative study was launched in 1993, and the HRT com-

ponent was halted three years early when it was found that the combined increased risk of heart disease and breast cancer overwhelmed lesser benefits to bone and colon.

The authors of *The Truth About Hormone Replacement Therapy* could not have foreseen the trial's early end, but in many other respects their perspective is prescient. Clinicians can confidently recommend this book to patients as a science-based resource written in lay language on all aspects of hormone therapy, from short-term use for menopausal symptoms to a thorough evaluation of alternatives like phytoestrogens, herbs and "natural" hormones. Its cautionary approach to these preparations, and to the risks of long-term hormone use, addresses many questions women have been asking since July. For busy physicians, the book could be the answer for all those unread studies (with a few exceptions, journal references are provided).

Since the release of the Women's Health Initiative findings, Network members have had one message for physicians: get drug companies out of medical education. Easier said than done — but the alternative, this book

implies, is to slide into an Illichian abyss in which the risks of seeing a physician outweigh the benefits.

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### Lifeworks

## A very political art

The story of Semsar Siahaan's artistic emergence reads like the script of *The Year of Living Dangerously*, Peter Weir's depiction of the social upheaval in Jakarta before President Sukarno's fall in 1965. There were times when Siahaan's practice of his art endangered his life, and other times when it saved him. In profiling his career, there seems no way to divorce his art from his humanitarian convictions and political activism. There is nothing "virtual" about this painter.

Siahaan was born in Medan, North Sumatra, in 1952. His father was one of the founders of the North Sumatra People's Army, formed in the 1940s to

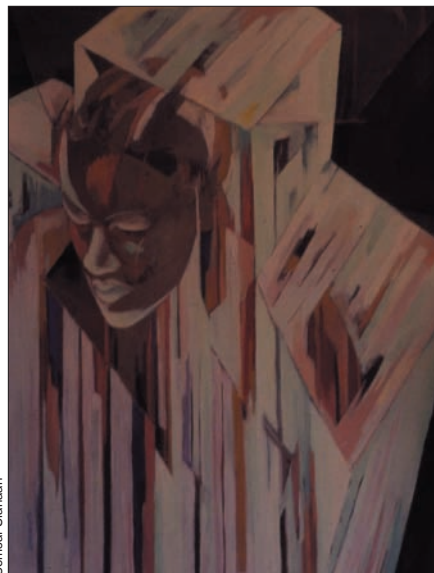
resist Japanese and Dutch colonialism. The senior Siahaan was appointed by Sukarno as the first chief commander of Medan, charged with defending North Sumatra from Dutch troops in their second move to reoccupy and recolonize Indonesia.

Siahaan started making works of art very young. "The first time I got art lessons was in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, from 1965 to 1968, when my father was an Indonesian military attaché to Yugoslavia," Siahaan recalled in my interview with him. In 1975, after graduating from high school, he studied painting at the San Francisco Art Institute. He moved back to Indonesia to study sculp-



Semsar Siahaan, 2001. *Double Self-Portrait*. Oil on canvas, 76 cm × 76 cm

ture at the Institute of Technology in Bandung, West Java, from 1977 to 1981. There followed various brushes with cultural and political authorities; he moved to the Netherlands, where he was active with expatriot Indonesian political dissidents and published a bulletin called *For the Sake of Democracy and Human Rights in Indonesia*. After returning to Indonesia in 1984, he applied his talent to making graphic banners and posters for political demonstrations and spent most of the proceeds from his drawings and paintings on funding grassroots coalition movements. In 1990 he went to Australia for a six-city tour of his exhibition and lecture series, backed by the Democratic Socialist Party and Greenpeace.



Semsar Siahaan, 2001. *The Genoa Tragedy*. Oil on canvas, 76 cm × 76 cm

In 1994 Siahaan received the Best in Show award at the Jakarta Biennale IX, an exhibition of contemporary Indonesian art. The work that gained him this prize was an installation piece, *Redigging the Mass Grave*. In late June 1994, after the government had banned three magazines and a leading newspaper, Siahaan was involved in organizing an alliance of Indonesian NGOs into the Indonesian Pro-Democracy Action, which held three

days of huge peace demonstrations. On the third day, Siahaan recalls, “hundreds of military reacted violently to the peaceful demonstrators.” He recounts his experience:

Twenty three were wounded. I was beaten up by seven soldiers. They knocked me down on the street, and broke my left leg into three pieces. They didn't stop kicking me in the stomach, legs and head with their boots, creating bruises all over my body. They threw me into the army truck, from which then they again threw me to the ground near the local police headquarters. My condition was such that my left leg was spinning around and in hellish pain. Two hours later an army ambulance came and took me, very roughly and by force, to the military hospital. There, they tortured me, bending my broken left leg like a V. They set the leg, improperly, in a thick plaster cast. Then they put me in an isolation room for two days, while the military colonel interrogated me.

In 1995 Siahaan's career, and possibly his life, was saved by an invitation to participate at an exhibition at the inauguration of the Singapore Art Museum. This was followed by shows in Australia and Japan. By 1997 he was an internationally recognized artistic voice. But this was also the year that military squads in Indonesia started kidnapping pro-democracy activists, including artists, students, professors, journalists and outspoken intellectuals. Dozens of youths were shot and killed in military operations against civilians across Indonesia that spring, and in May Jakarta exploded in riots that rapidly spiralled out of control.

Siahaan again escaped to Singapore, and later arranged his immigration to Canada. Since his arrival in 1999, he has achieved a visibility that even established Canadian artists have difficulty attaining. His third solo show in Victoria, presented at the Community Arts Council of Greater Victoria Gallery last summer, featured 25 works painted in 2001 and 2002.

Siahaan paints in oil, using a muralist style that sometimes incorporates elements of graffiti art. His works are



Semsar Siahaan, 2001. *The Global Trader*. Oil on canvas, 76 cm × 76 cm

allegorical narratives that collapse temporal and spatial relationships between episodes and frequently appropriate motifs and characters from myth and current events to refer to, or satirize, Western cultural imperialism and Eurocentric values. His paintings contain diverse references, such as George W. Bush enthroned (wearing Presidential-Seal-encrusted cowboy-boots of office), the ghostly Twin Towers, the Sumarian goddess Ereshkigal, Christ, and a transcendent bird-man figure. Despite these external allusions, these works also depict a personal journey.

Although his injured leg now prohibits Siahaan from marching in political demonstrations, his posters, banners and signs are carried by students in rallies in Canada and the US. His recent works are unsparing, depicting the emotional narratives of an immigrant from the warm-blooded societies of Indonesia in Anglophile Victoria. His political beliefs and faith in humankind are a blend of warning and of hopefulness. As he comments, “[There] is a global, young people's unity emerging to build a new, humanized life-vision through their activism and works of art.”

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