

## ASEAN

## Women painters hold up half the sky

By Pavan Kapoor

JAKARTA (JP): In commemoration of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Women's Month, the organization's secretariat is hosting the painting exhibition *Holding Up Half the Sky*.

The exhibition's title, taken from an ancient Chinese proverb, is fitting in this day and age that sees the enigmatic woman of the nineties, reputed as caring yet tough, playing an undisputed role in meeting the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

ASEAN member countries signed a declaration on the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region in 1988 and the secretariat was given the task of monitoring the agreement's implementation.

Although the painting exhibition lasts only from Oct. 7 to Oct. 31, it will be a prominent part of ASEAN's program schedule this year, since it is the artists who are most often the vehicle through which the dreams and aspirations of society find expression.

The exhibition displays over 100 paintings of 23 women artists hailing from several provinces in the country. The works indeed provide insight into why women

are gaining recognition in the art world today.

Organized by Komseni and Galeri Langgam Seni, the exhibition was officially opened by Pia Alisjahbana, who is the director of the Jakarta Foundation of Arts and on the Femina Group's board of directors.

The inspirational essence of womanhood is discernibly apparent from the varied themes and graphic styles of the paintings. The works cover a wide range of themes — from women performing everyday chores, as portrayed by Tuti Roosdiono, to performing exotic Balinese dances, as painted by Diany Asmina Sinung.

From floral offerings and rustic scenes to more opulent settings, the paintings reflect the artists' moods of love, peace and personal courage. Each work conveys the creators' individual sensitivities and aesthetics of observed realities.

The exhibition was opened with a poem by Debra H. Yatim, which touches on the liberation of a woman from the oppressions of life through her enduring power of goodness and pristine wom-

anhood. It was read by Jajang C. Noer: *I banished the dark/into the light/And painted the world/with shimmering sights.*

"The paintings are from a balanced blend of different generations which will carry us to a rainbow of realistic communication," says W. Moerany, the curator of Yayasan Seni Rupa, in the exhibition's attractive catalog.

One of the renowned artists represented at the exhibition is Kartini Sabekti, who had taken up painting full-time after having resigned from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. One of her first works, *Si Kecil, Masa Depan Kita* (The Kid, Our Future), depicts a young girl cradling a cat. The girl was the daughter of her housemaid with her favorite pet. From there Kartini expanded and is now currently a member of Indonesian Women Painters Association.

One of the first paintings to be sold before the opening was *Kapal Jepara* (Boat of Jepara) by Mamiék Putut Agung. Having studied painting at the Academy of Arts, she has been painting ever since and is now a member

of the Association of Indonesian Painters (API). Mamiék, who confesses to being obsessed with the theme of fishermen, produces works that boast a semi-realistic slash of color with a touch of surrealism.

Although Indonesian painters have traditionally stuck to realism in their contemporary themes and styles, the use of a vast spectrum of colors has come on the artistic scene which probes the psycho-spiritual desires of the artists themselves.

In paintings such as *Kuda Genteng* (Roof Tile Horse) by Wahyu Ekowati M. and *Apples and Roses* by Antin Hoed, vivid colorings work on the subconscious level to eventually synthesize into a celebration of life and its mysteries.

Stark and unique, the paintings of Siti Roeliyati engage the eye from afar. Her works experiment with forms by juxtaposing black and white while merging them into shades of gray.

Another attempt at semi-surrealism is the painting *Kama Sutra* by Yudha Iswari. A muted tone lends a sense of mystique to the couple who

seem to be preoccupied by gigantic butterflies hovering nearby. A unique style, splashed with inspirational themes from legends, is perhaps what makes Yudha's paintings come alive.

Titi Roosdiono exhibited four oil paintings focusing on the everyday life of women.

Playing with conflicting colors, Titi expresses the fact that no one is perfect.

"In every day life, no one is perfect. If a painting is perfect, it fails to be interesting to me. That's why the women in my inspirations are depicted as such too," she explained.

An eye-catching collection was contributed by artist Ida Hadjar Yw. Her large canvasses flaunt vivid colors brought out by an ample use of white. She touches on rustic themes, again with a touch of surrealism, through simplistic humanoid figures, all outlined by bold streaks of black.

The exhibition is being held in tandem with various other events, such as poetry readings and "An Evening of ASEAN Women's Short Stories".