

Ay Tjoe brings new luster to graphic art



Edwin's Gallery

Untitled, drypoint on paper, by Ay Tjoe Christine

At a time when graphic art have been left to artists with clear ideals and great integrity, such as Marida Nasution (born 1956) and a few other senior artists, Ay Tjoe Christine (born 1974) fills the spaces of Edwin's Gallery in Jakarta and Cemeti in Yogyakarta with work in which her command of the drypoint technique shines through, even in her mixed media pieces.

Drypoint is a printing method by which the design to be printed is etched directly into the metal printing plate. Prints made from this technique are usually marked by abrupt angular lines and a fuzzy effect in the resulting impressions.

In Ay Tjoe Christine's case, it is the strength with which she has engraved the flowing lines of her work that has become her unprecedented, characteristic feature.

In addition, an emotional profundity imbued in her work suggests she is experiencing a period of personal maturation.

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Her command of drypoint on paper has been an undeniable feature of her graphic art, and it is exactly the strength with which she handles drypoint that makes her pencil-and-crayon sketches so interesting. Combining this with gouache seems to mark another alluring beginning on her artistic path.

Featuring 62 pieces made between 1999 and 2003, the current show at Edwin's Gallery is a kind of retrospective revealing the stages in life that the young artist has gone through.

From being introverted and struggling within herself, it seems Ay Tjoe has come out of herself — to the point that she can both recall her previous self and relate that self to who she is now. Stretching the envelope of identity further, she uses mountains and urban structures as metaphors for human character and experience.

Aku dan Aku (Me and Me, 20x14.5 cm, drypoint on paper, 2003) shows the artist sitting opposite herself, whose face she smears beyond recognition. *Setengah* (Half) speaks of the self, or of the other, that always exists in an ambiguous realm. In *Sang Pengukur 6* (The Measurer 6), she is shown between two measuring rods, while in *Sang Pengukur 7*, she stands in front of a measuring rod, and in *Sang Pengukur 8*, she shows half a face behind a blackboard she is holding, which is marked with some dotted lines as the final countdown. Doubting herself at this

stage, Ay Tjoe Christine wonders why she has to judge people at first sight.

Si Kepala Besar 1 and *Si Kepala Besar 2* (The Big Head 1 and 2), *Si Pemabok*, *Sang Pemabok*, *Sang Fanatik* (The Drunk and the Fanatic), all drypoint on paper, 2003, certainly concern other people, and one can only guess the huge clashes she must have witnessed or experienced, particularly after having seen *Satu Titik di Jalan Kecil 1* (One Dot on a Small Road 1, drawing on paper), in which tousled hair furiously covers the background image — of a fight, perhaps?

Reflections on someone she thought was a close ally are explored in *Sekutu 1* (Ally 1) and *Sekutu 2* (Ally 2), both mixed media on canvas, 2002. *Sekutu 1* shows a woman with thumbs together, while her hair covers her face, and a man whose face is uncovered, as if to express his dominance. *Sekutu 2* features only the woman, the face gazing down on a single thumb. The accompanying text reads: "You said you wanted to be my partner, my closest and most wonderful partner. But see what you did. You only think of yourself, detached from me" (free translation).

The self always wishes to be prominent, like a mountain, ponders Ay Tjoe in her series *Aku dan Gunung* (Me and a Mountain, drypoint on paper, 2003).

The artist seems to have gone through heartbreaking solitude as it seems in *Lima Terangkat* (Five Lifted, mixed media on canvas, 100x80 cm), where one eye seems to watch the desolate landscape. In other works, she evokes a sense of the surreal, like in the work taking on the appearance of structures, which reflects her ponderings on how ingrained habits are hard to stamp out — like old buildings whose foundations are deeply rooted, she elaborates.

But like buildings always have a roof, the ego cannot stretch unlimited, she says in regards to *Atap Biru I and II* (Blue Roof I and II, mixed media on canvas, 2002).

Somehow, she seems to have found her sense of inner peace, at least as can be perceived from the structures on canvas titled *Rumah Bapa I and II* (Father's Home I and II), and *Tangga Merah* (Red Stairs, mixed media on canvas, 2002), that may perhaps symbolize a spiritual journey.

The exhibition offers an insight, not only into Ay Tjoe Christine's artistic skill, but also into her personal evolution which has left an impact — or imprint — on her images as they, too, evolve. The skeleton-like figures of the past, for instance, have mostly been replaced by fleshed-out figures, although the fingers featured in several of her pieces remain bony.

Hair, particularly tousled hair, is a striking feature in some of her recent pieces. A powerful accent, perhaps in the sense of the biblical story of Saul and his hair, the fury of her emotions seems to manifest itself in the movement of tousled hair. Her explorations on canvas, in pencil and crayon blended with gouache, is a new feature in her artistic development.

Edwin Galeri must be commended for holding this exhibition, even if quite a few pieces had to be borrowed to complement Ay Tjoe Christine's new developments.

This talented artist is one to watch as she travels further on her road to perfection.

Aku/Kau/Uak Solo Exhibition:
Ay Tjoe Christine
May 22 to June 1, 2003
at Edwin's Gallery
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