

# Chusin delves deeper

## Facet into body of work

Chusin Setiadikara likes to shock people. When the 53-year-old artist from Bandung starts a new painting he looks for something different that will challenge and disturb the viewer.

Two recent works by the artist, *Float & The Might*, currently on display at Galeri Nasional in Central Jakarta as part of the CP Open Biennale 2003 exhibition, certainly achieve just that effect.

Chusin has placed realistic, larger than life portraits of giant nudes in awkward surreal poses. The audience, drawn to the ghost-like transparency of the bodies, feels compelled to delve deeper into what is going on in the pictures. The bodies seem to be off balance as if falling; they also appear serene and strangely beautiful.

"The audience sees the image and knows it is different but they don't know why," says the quiet-spoken artist, adding that people become curious and look for explanations. The painter is at the National Gallery this week participating in discussions and tours of the exhibition.

In the exhibition Chusin's recent work goes beyond simple realistic representation of bodies to explore the tensions that exist in people. He creates a transparency effect in the portraits through what he calls "a technically very difficult process", using light and complex tones which render

the paintings realistic but at the same time surreal and almost unimaginable.

The last time the artist exhibited at Galeri Nasional was in 2002 with a solo exhibition of hyper-realistic paintings titled *Post-Photography Realistic Portrayal*, but since then he has moved on to new things. His inspiration comes from many sources which are constantly changing, but the basis of his work is from Eastern philosophy.

"I always use the philosophy of yin and yang. It's about the balance between strong and weak, light and

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dark and man and woman," he says. "Recently I have started to move on to something other than realistic painting. It is difficult to say what as I just follow my sensibilities and instinct... interaction with the outside world is very important."

Born into a large family in Bandung, Chusin's passion for painting began very early, partly due to an older brother who used to paint at home and read art books. Becoming an artist was always Chusin's "obsession" though he received no formal art education apart from a period of

training under the senior painter Barli Sasmitawinata in the Rangka Gempol Studio in Bandung.

He moved to Bali in 1987 and like many of his peers he saw the exotic island as an ideal location for an artist. Today, however, Bali provides no specific inspiration for his work which he says focuses on contemporary issues which he could paint anywhere.

It is perhaps due to leaving

his hometown of Bandung, combined with his reputation for being a maverick painter, that Chusin describes himself as an outsider. In the past his paintings have included *Ikan Asin* (Dried Salted Fish), associated with bad smells and the diet of the poor, as a metaphor for his own sense of marginalization.

"Wherever I am it's not really my place; there is a distance between me and my

surroundings, the government, political things, everything, also art," he says adding that it is through his art that he tries to bridge this gap and express himself.

However, living in Bali has provided some inspiration for Chusin's recent work though not from the most likely of corners. He sees the rich cultural traditions of the Balinese, coupled with the islanders growing desire for





JP/David Kennedy

## CHUSIN SETIADIKARA

all things modern, as a source of tension. Not surprisingly, given his interest in contemporary art and modern themes, this tension is often reflected in his work.

In *Traditional Market*, painted during 1997 and 1998, the period of the monetary crisis and the resignation of then president Soeharto, he depicted an old market which was demolished to make way for a modern supermarket. An aerial view shows local people scrambling about buying and selling food. In stark contrast a spaceship, from the popular American science fiction television series *Star Trek*, jets off into the sky far away.

"It shows the tension between Western modernity looking outward into space while everyone here is thinking about their own situation on the ground," he says explaining that traditional markets were particularly affected by the crisis.

Chusin believes the monetary crisis marked a turning point in the development of Indonesian art and resulted in artists becoming more engaged with the world around them.

"Art became less closed. Before that few artists wanted to participate in politics; they just worked in their studios. Maybe it's subjective but it just seemed that by the year 2000 artists were ready to change and they learned how to interact with

the outside world, even outside of Indonesia," he says.

Without regular changes in artistic direction, Chusin feels that he gets stuck.

Constant interaction with modern life through the media, debates with peers and travel abroad provides him with a continuous flow of inspiration with which to feed his creativity; his childhood obsession with art remains unabated and he follows art exhibitions around the world whenever the opportunity arises.

He exhibited at the prestigious Fukuoka Asian Triennale in Japan in 1999 and more recently at the Circle Point (CP) Foundation Artspace in Washington DC last year.

Given his insightful explorations of identity and modernity, Chusin could be seen as a natural choice of ambassador for CP, the Indonesian art foundation based in Washington, which challenges what it sees as Western domination in international art.

Chusin seems unperturbed by this perceived domination. This most important thing in his view is the spirit behind the art which, he says, has a unique Eastern flavor in Indonesia.

"In the East, peoples' everyday life is not traditional any more. Our culture has naturally changed but we've developed our own forms of artistic expression which are quite different to those in the West."