

Erica's new magical

Muscovite touch

After the stir of her retrospective exhibition in 2001, Erica Hestu Wahyuni comes with another surprise, peeping out of her studies in Moscow to hold a solo exhibition in her hometown Yogyakarta.

Emanating an intriguing change in the mode of expression, the drawings in soft crayon — her watercolors and acrylics presented in *Mockba Erica*, or Erica's Moscow, as the exhibition is titled, continue to radiate the artist's magic touch that has now grown deeper, and more mature.

Colored by the typical atmosphere of the changing seasons in Moscow, Russian art and culture, her studies at the Surikov Art Institute, as well as her personal experiences, her fascinating works also denote a change from the previous naïve and are more transparent than ever. One may say that she is well on her way toward Realism, a style that claims its own prominence in the realms of Russian art.

Personally maturing, the artist seems to have become deeply aware of her womanhood, as illustrated by her nudes with breasts conspicuously taking prominence, such as in *Dusha Nan Danskoy* (Soul in Nanskoy), *Pocco* (Rosso) and *Kabinet Kudoshnika* (The Artist's Studio). On the other hand, they might as well have been inspired by the many onion-shaped domes dominating the city.

Moscow indeed has fascinated Erica ever since she set foot on its soil. There and then she decided it was the place where she wanted to be. Her exhibition at Nadi Gallery in 2000 titled *My Diary*, testified to an overflowing sentiment. In January 2001 she spent a month experiencing wintertime with darkness falling early and affecting the overall

mood and the shades of the environment.

She registered at the Surikov Institute of Art, which is renown for its attachment to Realism. A dropout of the Yogyakarta's Indonesian Institute of Arts for alleged incompetence in realistic drawing, but had made this lack an asset in the course of time, she decided to pursue formal studies precisely at this institute.

"I have no intention to change my style," she said at that time. Indeed, all she actually wanted was to enrich the style of the naïve that had led her to the summit of success.

Carla Bianpoen

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The professors at Surikov immediately recognized her talent and accepted her as a student without bothering about entry tests. So, after having her solo exhibition at the age of barely 30, she left for Moscow, to pursue formal studies, particularly focusing on the monumental.

Her fascination with the Russian realms seems to be continuing, as can be seen in her drawings depicting the Bolshoi Theatre, the *Krasnaya Polshad* (Red Square), *Khudoshnik V Maskve* (The Artist in Moscow) or *Ura! Ya Maskve* (Hooray, I am in Moscow), depicting herself in Indonesian as well as in Russian attire.

It doesn't mean the chosen path has been without obstacles. Language constraints and a way of life that is completely different from what she was used to have often made her feel like groping in the unknown, as expressed in *Karavel Khudoshnika* (The artist's vessel). The drawing depicts herself



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Matroshya by Erica Hestu Wahyuni

on a vessel roaming the Russian waters with two figures swung over the left and right side.

Story telling is a feature that will probably never disappear from her canvases, just as the fairy tales of yonder never fail to enchant. But, unlike her former oeuvre, her current works include cultural elements to express personal feelings and visions.

Appropriating the *matryoshka*, a set of painted wooden dolls within dolls, a traditional icon of Russian culture, her 4 x 2 meters large painting in acrylic titled *The Metro Scheme of Erica's Heart* depicts the meeting of two cultures,

showing two Ericas, one in Indonesian and the other in Russian attire linked over unusually wonderful deep-bright colored *matryoshkas*.

The Russian icon also serves as her metaphor to elaborate on her personal condition, a sad face "hiding" the turbulence within, as drawn in *Matroshya* (40 x 60 cm). The text of her accompanying poem makes it even clearer.

No jokes, no laughter, the dove is just a part of hope; time and again dying a meaningless death, the dove tries to keep clean although stained by a thousand wild crows, she writes in an accompanying poem, adding that the dove, which is

spreading its wings and flying out, remains clean in the silence of prayer, consoled by working on the endless canvas. Another poem tells about the fallacy of sexual intercourse.

Ultimately, however, love prevails, as Erica seems to say in *Batari Cinta* (Goddess of Love) 3 x 3 meters, a self-portrait with multiple arms, holding gender signs in one hand, a book, hand phone, brushes and a tube of paint in five other hands. Her crown is made of little shapes of buildings found in Moscow as well as Javanese ornaments, a large size heart is painted on the chest with two small breasts popping up, the rest of the canvas filled with images relating to herself playing the piano, praying in the lotus position under the tree, the bad Prince, Moscow scenery, the elephant — a one-time mascot, and the heart.

"What matters most is not what the bare eyes see, but rather what the heart perceives," says Erica.

Slatinskiy V.N., the head of research and dean of the School of Painting and Composition, praises her talent, as does Maksimov E.N., professor at the School of Art at the Surikov Institute.

In one more year, Erica will have finished her study of monumentalism in Moscow.

"We hope she will have fresh and attractive works to offer Russia," writes Maksimov.

Will Erica be able to fulfill such expectations? Let's wait and see.

Mockba Erica (Erica's Moscow) exhibition of drawings, acrylics and watercolors. June 6-18, 2003 at Bentara Budaya Yogyakarta, Jl. Suroto 2 - Kotabaru, Yogyakarta. Phone/Fax 0274-376146.