

# Female artist explores

## 'body as a prison' in exhibition

In Western countries, society developed fast after World War II. Education has been democratized and women have entered the ranks of productive income earners.

Compared to say, Middle Eastern countries, Indonesia is relatively woman-friendly. But what happens when a free thinking spirit is born in a

woman's body and is put in Indonesian society?

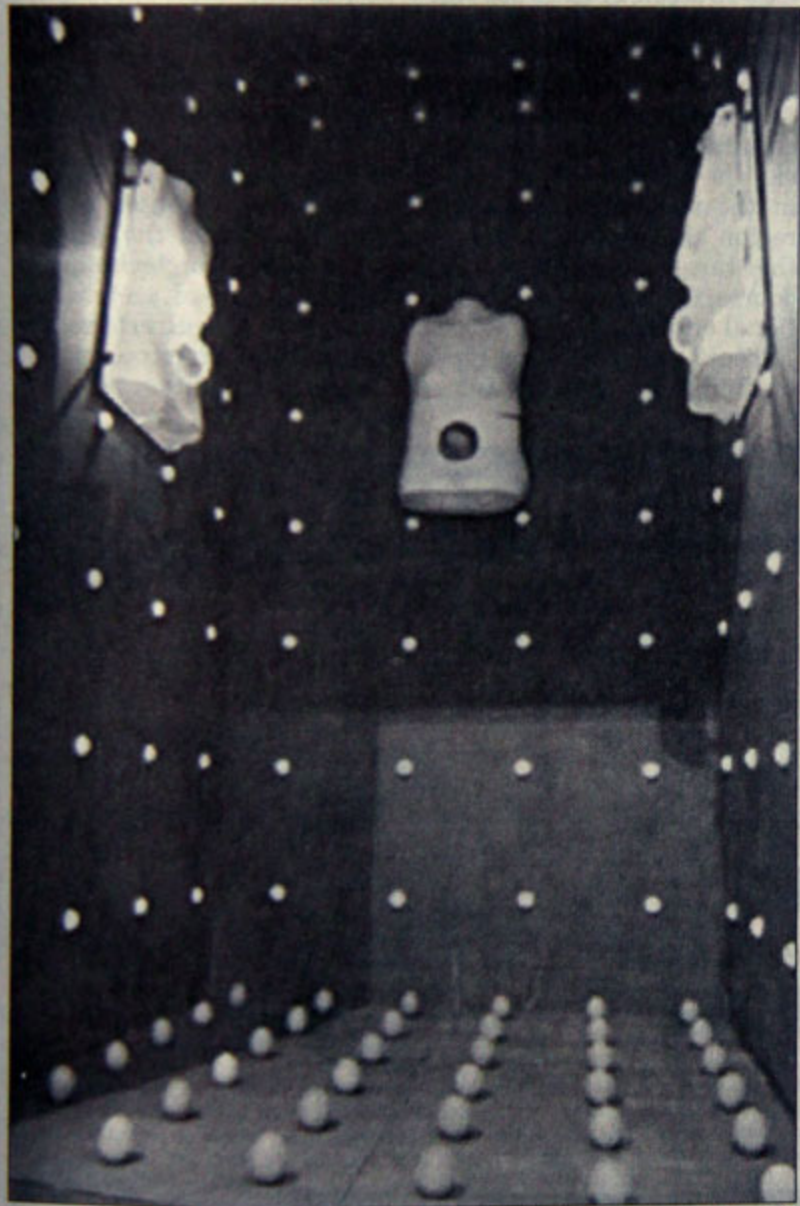
Tita Rubi was born in 1970 in Bandung to a middle class family. She enjoyed a lot of freedom when she was young and going through the elementary and secondary school system.

She obviously did not get infected by the Orde Baru (New Order) way of thinking.

But the freedom might have not been accompanied by the same measure of responsibility.

Initially, her parents did not guide her at all with respect to her future. Why should they, girls get married and then become housewives, don't they?

So when Tita had the possibility of continuing her education after middle school,



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she applied for entry for three very different courses at three different, well-respected institutions. She opted for Japanese literature, management and fine arts.

Looking into this yet unknown academic world, she observed that the campus of the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) had the most trees and space. There, one also did not necessarily have to wear a skirt when studying fine arts.

So she chose this campus! There she made an unusual choice: She chose to specialize in ceramics with four other students, only one of them male.

In the relative freedom of her student life, she became confronted with the lack of freedom and of expression imposed by the former regime.

But if you want to make a point, why not just say so? She currently has a solo exhibition in Benda Art Space in Yogyakarta where she is presenting seven works. We asked her for some explanation. Near the entrance is a small work on a flowerpot stand. It depicts someone without legs

*Lindungi aku dari keinginanmu, or Protect me from what you want, by Tita Rubi.*

or with legs buried in the soil.

Behind the person is a door without walls. The title is *I lost my legs* and is a birthday present to her husband. It depicts someone trapped in hardened cement. It is symbolic and means that she experiences the house in which they live as a trap.

In the back of the gallery room is a small space only open to the front.

The walls are covered with blue fabric. Camphor balls seem to hold the fabric to the wall. On the floor eggs are placed. The three sidewalls each have a female torso in which an embryo is visible.

The title of this work is  *Lindungi aku dari keinginanmu*, or "Protect me from what you want". We cannot enter the little room because of the eggs. What does our brain say: hens always lay eggs; if we go in we will brake the eggs so we cannot come too close to the torsos; camphor balls conserve and protect?

The little room has lighting from the ceiling. Tita wants to express with this work a children's screams! Is it not so that parents, when they have children, usually project their own wishes on them? They impose on their children. They have to be a "good" boy or girl.

Tita feels that the same goes for women: There are more rules for women than for men and in an analogy to children, women need protection from what men want them to be. On the right wall is a work of a very different kind. We see, on about two by three and a half meters, interconnected squares of lace.

On the lace are ordinary cheap bath slippers. The slippers are decorated with colorful feathers and materials.

The colors used can be seen as "cheap" ones that are, like lace, associated with "the girls behind the windows". This work is titled *Situs Pandora*. It refers to porno sites as can be found on the Internet and aimed at men.

These men want to see such sites but at the same time dismiss the woman in the pictures as having no value or like *sandal jepit*, cheap bath slippers. This work has no clay or ceramic figures.

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Other works do have small ceramic figures like *The silent sound of war*. This is inspired by a song by the group Dire Straits and refers to the loneliness, empty feeling of the soldier who has nothing to look forward to.

*We don't need any wall* refers to people who trust each other. If the trust is gone however, people need walls to protect themselves. The exhibition and the artist's explanation did shake us up.

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It made me wonder in how far I am the product of my parents' needs and can still go around in the world-trusting people.

A catalog with Indonesian and English texts has been issued.

*The exhibition Tita Rubi Seltubuh in Benda Art Space, Jl. Kemetiran Kidul 62A, Yogyakarta 55262, Tel/fax 0274 512010 runs until Sept. 12, 2002.*

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