

Local artists pay homage to Frida Kahlo

By Pavan Kapoor

JAKARTA (JP): The exhibition *Membaca Frida Kahlo* (Reading Frida Kahlo), yet another homage to the great Mexican artist-cum-modern icon, was planned perhaps unintentionally at a befitting moment, as the country celebrated its legendary woman figure, Kartini, on Saturday.

The exhibition at Gallery Nadi is unique in its aspect of displaying not only paintings but also Frida figurines, sculptures and Frida memorabilia. It is a visual bonanza for those already familiar with the artist.

The charisma of Kahlo is clearly visible by the adoration that her followers bestow on her through artistic expression. Perhaps the words engraved on her grave ring true even today: "Friend, sister of the people, great daughter of Mexico, you are still alive."

The overwhelming awe could perhaps arise from the high spirited accomplishments that she rebelliously acquired in her short, tumultuous life. Born in the Revolutionary era (1907 - 1954) when women were still kept behind the drapes, Kahlo rebelliously participated in politics and set her canvases and murals afire as she depicted gory scenes, both personal and public.

She suffered a major accident as a teenager when she was impaled on a steel spoke in a tram accident. It was to change her life forever (she subsequently underwent 30 operations). Her "second accident of life", as one critic put it, was to marry the malevolent and domineering Diego Rivera, one of the artists. Heri Dono, includes Kahlo's abhorrence for Diego's harsh character in *The Domination of Diego Riviera* (71 cm x 94 cm.)

The team of Indonesian artists shows reverence to her omnipotent character and work not only in artworks subjective to aspects of her life. Some see the turmoil and crisis that their homeland is gasping through as a mirror of the situation that existed during Kahlo's lifetime.

Perhaps that is the inspiring thought behind Maartri Djonghi's, *Two pages from the book of famous couples* (210 cm x 244 cm - 2 pieces). One of the famous couples is Kahlo and Rivera and the other is, poignantly, President Abdurrahman Wahid, known familiarly as Gus Dur, and Megawati

Soekarnoputri. Using the technique of digital printing and painting, the artwork seems strikingly realistic.

The piercing gaze of jet black eyes from under dominant black eyebrows are a unique aspect of Kahlo's face and an enduring image. Dipo Andy's *Frigate-Frigade*, depicts her as a somewhat medieval half masculine - half feminine figure. There is also Tisna Sanjaya's *Painting Frida in our Garden*, that reveals a motley of impoverished figures straining under the weight of logs of wood while the focal point attempts to ensnare the viewer to the lone figure painting in abandon.

At the entrance to the gallery is Sutjipto Adi's *Long Walk to Freedom*, (150 cm x 100 cm) which depicts a realistic portrait of Kahlo surrounded by an abstract variegated analogy of eagles and surrealist shapes that assume an ode to this mighty woman.

There is also the poignant *Kalo-kalo jadi Kahlo* (80 cm x 70 cm) by Yuwantoro Adi, showing a shy child surrounded by images of the artist.

Agung Kurniawan attempts to repaint one of Frida's more popular paintings *The Two Fridas* but adds a personal



Dede Eri Supria's *Humus* (2001).
Oil paint on canvas, 105 cm x 100 cm.

Nadi Gallery

touch by painting his own face on one of the two Fridas in the painting. Most of Kahlo's paintings depict bloody body parts, carcasses and volatile images as she traveled on the journey of releasing her conflicts and personal upheavals in her graphic and sometimes bewildering works. It is thus often the course also taken by her admirers.

Astari Rasjid has renamed this painting *T-Time for Frida*. The vein of blood that attaches both their hearts passes through a watch which denotes how both the women are in similar circumstances, only divided by time. A version of this is Regina Bimadona's *Two Breeding Breasts* and S. Teddy's *Mama Frida*.

Ivan Sagito inspires a black and white version with ink on paper in *Slamet yang tak berkahlo* for those who have not been "Kahlo-ed" yet in the posthumous.

Besides canvas art, some of Frida's fans have deviated and displayed sculptures and figures. The imposing figurine constructed by Maarti Djorghi stands tall in the main foyer of the gallery. Kahlo's hard and stern expression is softened with the black monkey hugging her left arm. She holds black puppies on leashes, which reminds one somewhat of Cruella De Ville from the 101 Dalmatians stories. Her gold-booted encased left leg is exposed, telling us about the one leg that was amputated due to gangrene infection.

Koni Herawati places a mirror where the face of Kahlo should be in *Face Off* (50 cm x 80 cm), as if inspiring onlookers to see themselves in the icon's face and draw inspiration from it.

Asmudjo Irianto has compiled bits and pieces in three boxes named *Fridaphilia*. Cushion, buttons, locks and an electric socket are a part of what Asmudjo feels are relics and articles from the past life of a great woman and great artist.

Altje Uly borrows a poignant sentence from Frida's diary and constructs the very interesting and imaginative art piece *Milagros*. Perhaps encumbered by the lack of a limb, Frida consoled herself by writing, "Feet, what do I need them for if I have wings to fly."

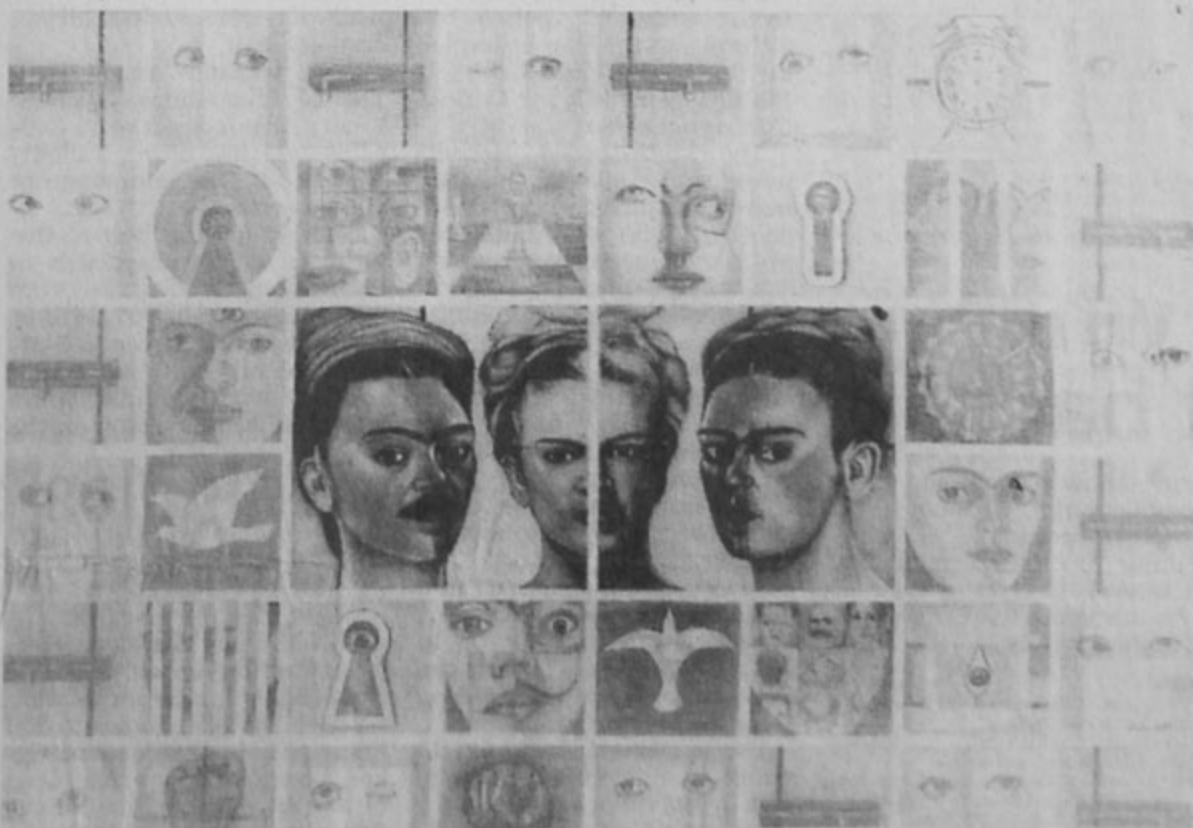
Some of the other artists represented are Agus Suwage (*FKLHCB - Frida Kahlo's Lonely Heart Club Band*), FX Harsono who has portrayed Frida as a mother figure in *We Don't need another Hero, Every Mother is a Hero* and Ghulam Zulkifli's *Unfinished Dialogue*. Art binds lovers of art in one color; the exhibition is an eye-opener for those not yet familiar with the awareness of Indonesian artists of the international art arena.

The exhibition is at Nadi Gallery at Jl. Kedoya Raya 53 (tel. 5818129) until April 29.



Yuwantoro Adi's *Kalo-kalo Jadi Kahlo (If I Become Kahlo)*, 2001. Oil paint on canvas, 80 cm x 70 cm

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Ghulam Zulkifli's *Unfinished Dialogue* (2001). Pencil and colored pencil on canvas, 100 cm x 140 cm.

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