

Mocking social injustices, political chaos with artwork

By Tjahjono Ep.

YOGYAKARTA (JP): This year's ongoing Biennale Fine Art VI exhibition in Yogyakarta is considered an important art show as it is taking place at the turn of the second millennium. The event is an important landmark reflecting the ups and downs of artists in Yogyakarta, an ancient "cultural city".

The show, from Feb. 8 until Feb. 18 at Yogyakarta's Taman Budaya (Cultural Park), exhibits the works of 33 local artists. The works consist of nine installation works, one performance piece, 22 paintings and one work of photography.

The exhibition has as its theme current social realities. This theme is evident in the acrylic on tree bark piece titled *Roh-roh tentang Negeri Ini* (About This Country's Soul) by Diyah Yulianti and *Rayuan Pulau Kelapa* (Coconut Island's Beauty), an acrylic on canvas by Popok Tri Wahyudi.

Painter I. Nyoman Marsiadi presents his *Mr. Kapitalis*. It depicts a man lighting a cigarette while urinating. Beside him is a man passionately kissing his lover while clutching a glass of liquor. In this work Nyoman criticizes the glamorous lifestyle of the bourgeoisie.

An outstanding installation work on display, *Gonjang-ganjing* (Chaos) by Hedi Haryanto, mocks the current political chaos in Indonesia.

Gonjang-ganjing is made up of a wooden sketch map of Indonesia. The wooden bars are fixed to four wooden poles with steel wire. The map hangs between the four poles. Just above the map hangs a light bulb full of various brands of medicine. The four poles are covered in stickers about the drugs.

Another installation work mocking the present political confusion in Indonesia is called *Gawat Darurat* (Emergency) by Eddi Prabandono.

The artist has placed river stones on an iron crossbar. One stone bears the inscription "Sabang", the name of Indonesia's westernmost town in Aceh. About 1.5 meters to the east of the stone stands another iron beam with a stone on top of it bearing the inscription "Merauke", the town at Indonesia's eastern tip in Irian Jaya.

On the floor in between the two stones lies a rock with the inscription "Sampai" (Arrive). Each stone is illuminated with dim red light. Behind the three stones is a closed glass box containing liquid and a pig's head.

Bunga Jeruk, a young artist, exhibits a work titled *Joining the Cult*. Like the other installation works on display, it focuses on existing social realities.

In this installation, Jeruk arranges 12 pillows on a white iron beam. On each pillow is a white light bulb cap and pictures of various cultural products: a Gucci wristwatch, sunglasses, lipstick. One of the pillows bears a picture of Grace Kelly pierced with dozens of sewing needles.

The single performance piece in the show is presented by Iwan Wijono. Titled *Sudah Saatnya Warung Itu Merah* (It's High Time that Food Stall Turns Red), the piece consists of a traditional food cart, widely used by food hawkers, loaded with packages of rice, a plate of fried tempeh, a plate of fried chicken legs, a transistor radio set and a pot for boiling water.

Accompanied by a drum beat and a choir, a group performs a traditional East Timorese dance around the cart while Iwan sprays red paint over the cart and its content. Soon everything is red. Maybe only Iwan knows what

this work means — and he keeps it to himself.

Contemporary art, which observers say develops painfully slowly in Yogyakarta, receives great attention in this event, which is held every two years.

Sumartono, an art critic from the Yogyakarta-based Indonesian Art Institute (ISI), said one of the major problems hindering the development of contemporary art in the city is the lack of sponsorship.

Contemporary art has always been used as a means to allude to the widespread social, economic and political injustices, Sumartono says. This, he says, explains why the government is reluctant to support its development.

The use of contemporary art as a "fighting instrument" against injustices began in 1974, when the New Order government under authoritarian Soeharto treated artistic expression with suspicion.