

# Apin's influential legacy on display

Carla Bianpoen  
Contributor/Jakarta

In the Indonesian art world, Mochtar Apin (1923-1994) is a resounding name whose range of interests and unique versatility in style produced an artistic legacy that has held the interest of art connoisseurs to this day.

Born in Padang Panjang, West Sumatra, Apin was among those who benefited from a Dutch formal education during the colonial period and became one of the very few who was able to acquire a strong intellectual basis for producing modern art.

From a very young age, he was able to nurture his artistic bent through special instruction from Dutch art teachers.

Awarded one scholarship after another, he pursued art studies at the Kunstnijverheid School in Amsterdam, the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris and the Deutsche Akademie der Kuenste in Berlin, and became proficient in a variety of techniques.

Using his command of techniques, and juxtaposing styles with a variety of topical interests, his oeuvre is of a fascinating profusion, as revealed by an exhibition titled "Search and Changes", currently on at Edwin's Gallery.

As curator Enin Supriyanto suggests, in the 40 years of his creative life, the late Apin continuously explored how he could create something new

out of the styles and genres he had mastered.

In many cases he was successful, as particularly demonstrated by the refreshing impact of his prints, where rigid geometrical or quasi-geometrical forms are softened by lyrical in-between lines, and color compositions of green, blue and brown against a light gray background, as highlighted in *Pemandangan Gunung* (Mountain View, 1989).

Similarly, the flowing lines in abstract shapes like *Burung* (Bird, 1986), the rhythmic "scratches" that indicate a volcanic eruption (in *Gunung Meletus*), or the flowing of a river in *Pemandangan Sungai* (River View, 1986) — all compositions of rare and vibrant colors — demand our total attention.

His explorations also included the use of embossing to add texture, the combining of graphic with batik printing patterns, and the blending of traditional decorative motifs with abstract geometric or expressionist modes.

His exploring of combinations of techniques and genres is also apparent from his work *Menenun* (Weaving, 1975) in which he brings together his skills in photography, print, space and color composition, and depicting the nude.

His mixing of media does not stop there, as one can see from his painting *Family Figures* (1972), which is indicated as being an oil painting, but actually features the use of mixed media. According to his wife, Sien, the shapes featured in this work are painted



Family Figures, acrylic on canvas

Edwin's Gallery

pieces of paper that have been merged onto the canvas. It is one of the most striking works in the exhibition.

Marked by a delicately transparent quality of sentiment exposed in a mood that induces a sense of primeval significance at first glance, a closer look reveals a juxtaposition of images within the transparent layers varying between the realistic and the imagined.

As this is the only example of its kind in the exhibition, one may wonder whether this was indeed the only work in this genre that the artist ever produced.

Another fascinating work is *Transparent Composition*, an abstract work on Plexiglas positioned in the manner of an installation, allowing indirect lighting to bring about a sense of relief and depth.

His paintings in acrylic, titled *Kaligrafi* (1986-1988), are also of interest. Unlike calligraphy in its original forms, they appear like a pell-mell of bold brush strokes as if dropped in a rage, or like the aftermath of great devastation.

For all the variety that Apin's oeuvre offers, it seems that the female nude was

among his favorite subjects in the final few years before he passed away.

This is apparent from the separate space dedicated to nudes painted between 1988 and 1991. These have become a point of controversy, with some conjuring up theories to "defend" what might appear to be pornographic images, and others criticizing what they see as signs of voyeurism.

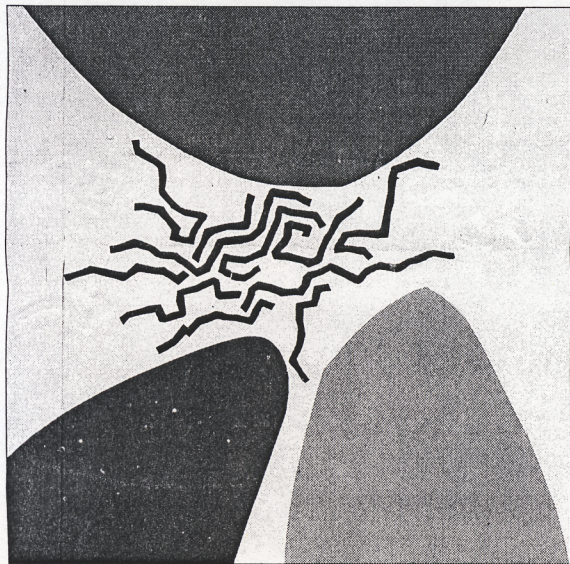
The curator of this exhibition prefers to put this all within the context of the artist's exploration of combination, whether in the sense of combining genres, traditions in nude painting, or the exploration of pornographic painting.

While one may notice a lesser degree of arousal in the eyes of his subjects, in many of which there even appears to be a shiver of resistance, as in the painting *Kolam Renang I* (Swimming Pool, 1991), or involuntary surrender, as in *Wanita Berpayung* (Woman With an Umbrella, 1990), and *Senja* (Twilight, 1991), elements of voyeurism continue to be apparent, as may be seen in *Berbaring* (Lying Down, 1990) and *Surat* (Letter, 1990).

The reason why he seems to have become so obsessed with

the female nude in his advanced age is a matter of conjecture — a puzzle to which the search for an answer may appear futile now. But as contemporary art is engaged in a constant reshuffling of ideas, images and the ways in which we perceive them, so too will people's perceptions of Apin's nudes.

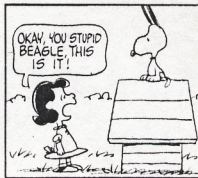
Search and Changes  
The works of Mochtar Apin  
through June 19  
Edwin's Gallery  
Jl. Kemang Raya 21  
Jakarta Selatan  
Tel. 7194721, 71790049



Edwin's Gallery

Pemandangan Gunung (Mountain View), screen print

## PEANUTS



## ROSE IS ROSE