

Exhibition examines shifting meaning of art

What is art? The question has been posed in virtually every period of time. It will probably be there forever, and ideas of what can be considered real art will evolve as time goes by.

If art was previously the sole prerogative of galleries, museums and exhibitions, today new initiatives and added ideas are emerging.

Cemeti Gallery, known for its alternative stance, is currently showcasing its belief that art should be community based. Artists are not just individuals producing ethical and aesthetic products, says Nindityo Adipurnama, who owns the gallery with his wife Mella Jaarsma. Artists are actors and players in the changing of societal values, he contends.

To celebrate the 15th anniversary of the gallery, Cemeti's current exhibition, titled *Exploring Vacuum I*, shows the works of artists who created their art installations in cooperation with other artists, artisans or a community-based group.

Prominence is given to the process of art-making, rather than the end product itself. That, however, does not mean that the end product has no value, for as the exhibition shows, art can be an empowering element in daily life.

At least, that is evident from Moelyono's installation called *Sanggar Bermain Anak Tani (SBAT)*, a kind of

kindergarten for farmers' children in Sumber, a hamlet near Ponorogo in East Java. Moelyono, an installation artist, works together with women working at health posts to provide free education applying the Children Learning Center module, developed in Poona, India.

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Together with the women, Moelyono set up his art installation that shows how an artist can make a difference in a poverty stricken area: the space of the playgroup with scant material may be even more exciting to the children than a luxurious interior. The black wild boar on the wall represents a popular tale of the boar that was in fact a princess.

Another example of art in daily life is the attractive installation of daily utensils and other products made of wood and rattan brought together by Anusapati, a pioneer of integrating local culture in contemporary wood sculptures. He cooperated with product designers, artisans and craftsmen who remained anonymous.

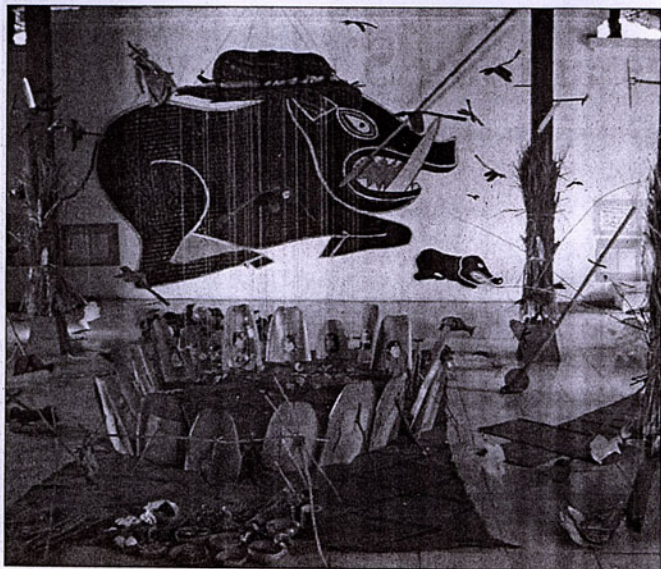
Then, what is life without reading? There is a choice of serious reading or comics. The

installation of serious reading is titled *The Art of War*, which was inspired by the book of the same name, one of the world's great classics of military and political theory, and

written by Niccolò Machiavelli, the great political philosopher of the Renaissance.

Twenty blank books with the cover of Machiavelli's *Art of War* book were distributed by

Jumaldi Alfi to his 20 partners/respondents of various professions and educational backgrounds, who were asked to treat it as a diary. Responses included humorous and artis-



JIP/Cemeti Art House

Sanggar Bermain Anak Tani

tic comments, but also violent reactions, such as the hammering of a nail into the book. Only one respondent made a sculpture in which the theories of Machiavelli were integrated.

As for the comics, there was Eko Nugroho's promotion stand for the *Daging Tumbuh* comics, which is published every six months. *Daging Tumbuh* is an alternative comic, in which anyone wishing to do so can contribute.

There are also collaborations between Santi Ariestyowanti and a graphic design group, a writer, a musician and fashion designer to project a character in a novel, which is formed through perspective, graphics, mode and music.

Working with blind people, Syagini Ratnawulan creates words in Braille on the wall, while Yustoni Volunteero collaborates with *Surat*, Cemeti's newsletter.

There is also architect Eko Prawoto, who cooperates with ceramist Koniherawati and Mahatmanto, a lecturer of architecture to explore texture as an element in architecture. A facade of a building is seen with tiny ceramic decorations glued against the plaster.

Jompjet, collaborating with writer Ugoran Prasad and sculptor Rita Darani, creates hoods for two persons. Each hood has a monitor that allows the viewer to see what his neighbor is doing. While it is meant to raise awareness of

one's behavior in the eyes of other people, it can also be perceived as a spying tool.

An interactive documentary by Agung Kurniawan titled *ASLI Akademi Seni Lupa Indonesia* or the Indonesian Institute of the Art of Forgetfulness has clippings from newspapers under the New Order regime, with Kurniawan's commentaries showing how artists with the fiercest comments against the New Order regime were often very close to that regime.

Some don't like to think of their closeness, even ignoring that part in their biographic recounts. Sketchbooks with the clippings images lay on a table where visitors are invited to comment with colors.

To underline the importance of truth, this project will tour art schools, as well as elementary schools and kindergartens.

While the kind of art presented in *Exploring Vacuum* is certainly not everybody's cup of tea, it does raise the awareness that the understanding of art is shifting in line with the change of time.

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