

THE ARTS

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Exhaust pipes a metaphor for reviled New Order

By Ahmad Solikhon

YOGYAKARTA (JP): No loud growling noises and no thick black smoke pollutes the Cemeti Art House, where an exhibition with the theme of exhaust pipes is now under way. What you find is a debate of sorts, featuring installations, paintings and drawings, all attempting to recapture the oddities of the New Order era.

An exhaust pipe is generally understood to be part of a motorized vehicle, and acts to muffle the sound of the vehicle's engine while filtering dirt from the exhaust fumes. To artists, however, an exhaust pipe can be interpreted in a variety of ways in connection with human behavior and daily life.

An exhaust pipe may be likened to an anus, as both not only dispose of high-pressure gas but also produce sound that many people find to their distaste. To the Javanese, the word "anus" is not usually used, as they think it better to use a more polite way to refer to it indirectly.

Grasping for the essence of an exhaust pipe, the artists taking part in the exhibition are also participating in a peaceful campaign for an honest and fair election, not by joining noisy parades of cars or motorcycles, but by using original works of art as their medium to criticize social and political problems prevailing during the New Order era.

Lasting from May 1 until July 31 at Cemeti Art House, this exhibition features 17 artists' views on the exhaust pipe. An

exhaust pipe may be considered a pipe through which putrid or noxious matter will be released, or it may be thought of as a source of problems, or even a hole that gives pleasure and is found in all living creatures.

If an exhaust pipe is well taken care of and causes minimal pollution, goes one view, the world will be spared a host of problems.

One of the participating artists, I. Gak Murniasih, features seven expressionist oil paintings, all in one frame, on a canvas measuring 1 meter by 2 meters. One of the paintings, called *Ibu Detik Berdebar* (Mother of Throbbing Second), is a picture of a vagina, which looks like an open crater of the Merapi volcano, between two thighs lying on a bed. This painting depicts how vulnerable women are to rape, particularly in riots, in which women may experience sexual harassment.

For Murniasih, who has intentionally focused on the female sex organ as the main subject of his paintings, the struggle of women for gender equality is still neglected.

In the middle of the gallery 17 human heads made of gypsum are placed in a row on logs supported by four concrete legs. Lamps shaped like chillies hang from each neck, connected by a white hose to a bottle on the

floor containing urine. A red cross is on the glass bottle, while a 14-inch television set and a video recorder are perched on the wooden table, as if monitoring the sociopolitical oddities of the New Order.

This installation work by Heri Dono is entitled *Badut-Badut Politik* (Political Clowns). In this work Dono takes a close look at political figures who are concerned only with their own interests. He has included a television set because he would like the community to watch TV to learn about the nation's socio-political condition. It is the urine of the political clowns, kept in a bottle, that has sullied the lives of the people.

In one corner of the inner room there are 95 cardboard boxes, some stuck on the wall and others scattering on the floor. A heart-shaped hole is made on one side of each of the brown boxes and a used can of mosquito repellent and a can of air freshener are both stuck into the hole.

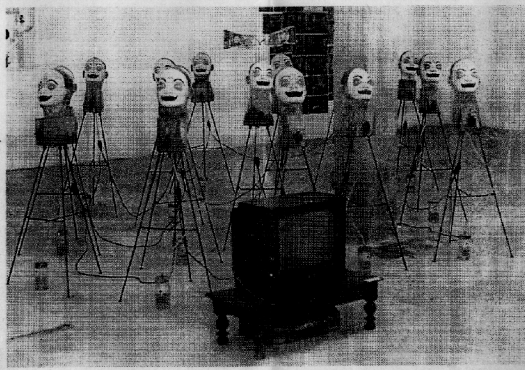
Some boxes also have pictures of community figures and artists stuck on them. This installation work addresses environmental destruction, which is nearly always neglected, but which can actually cause the deaths of people, as well as many less profitable creatures.

The collapse of a clove tree which has just bloomed is also a source of inspiration for another interesting installation work. Two continuously burning kerosene lanterns and a pile of bird cages are hung on twigs,

among the leaves. This work by Anusapati, called *Empty Nest*, shows how people can demonstrate their mundane arrogance and disregard of other people's sufferings. Burned forests and the habitat of the birds have disappeared without a trace.

Shigeo Kobayashi, hailing from Japan, is also taking part in the exhibition, with his installation work titled, *I am convinced that amidst the confusion there is hope for the future*. This work shows a tiny oyster sticking out a long snout, on the tip of which there is a red rose. The medium of this installation is wood painted in a variety of colors. Kobayashi is convinced that democratization will be a reality, although blood is the price of it.

Meanwhile, Agung Kurniawan, relying on his drawing technique, describes the sociopolitical conditions prevailing in this country: poverty, political intimidation and anarchic acts which may spell the death of human beings. This description is reinforced by Nervita Primadewi, who, through her audio-visual work, intentionally presents the throbbing of the brain of a human being subjected to the arbitrary violence of soldiers. In this installation work, *Kembali jadi Otak* (Be the brain again), a combination of media and television, handycam and charcoal scattered on the floor; Primadewi asks all of us to think clearly in dealing with today's uncertain political situation.



Badut-Badut Politik (Political Clowns), an installation work by Heri Dono.

According to Nindito Adipurnama, the owner of the gallery, the theme of the exhaust pipe has been considered since the 1997 general election. To many people election campaigning highlighted by the deafening growing sound of exhaust pipes, is brutality of a sort that can disturb the peacefulness of the community. To Adipurnama, an exhaust pipe may be interpreted as another way to understand the

current sociopolitical situation.

"That this is so is evident from the works put on show in this exhibition. Besides, you can interpret yourself what response these young artists have given to the exhaust pipe theme in their works," he said.

Adipurnama has spent 11 years at what was formally known as Cemeti Gallery, and has promoted as well as organized the exhibition of the

works of Indonesian and foreign contemporary artists.

In May, the gallery assumed the new name Cemeti Art House. This change of name is intended to stimulate interaction and exchanges among various fine art disciplines. There is also a plan to involve the local community around the art house and Indonesian artists concerned with the development of the country's fine arts.

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