

Artistic reflections of women's

JAKARTA (JP) For many curators and art institutions, exhibitions of women artists do not contain professional value. But the current art exhibit at the World Bank in Washington, D.C. proves them wrong.

Marked by artistic and professional excellence, close to 150 artworks of 120 women artists from the World Bank's member countries all over the world, including Indonesia, have taken three spacious halls of the World Bank's headquarters. They focus on women's concerns without being feminine in a stereotyped sense.

As Ismail Serageldin, Vice President of the World Bank, said in a foreword: "It is an affirmation of the Self and a counterpoint to the Other. No simple reclining nudes or frilly bows and flowers are used to reflect the feminine, to pander to the stereotype, the role cast by societies for so many women of the world."

A Woman's View: Equality, Development and Peace is the title of the exhibition organized by the World Bank Staff Art Society as a reflection of a growing awareness of women's significance as an essential part of humankind.

For many observers of change, an exhibit of this for-

By Cebe Todoebin

mal at the prestigious headquarters of the World Bank, which is more known for its lending activities, may have a great impact on the greater public's sensitivity to prevailing gender disparities. Regine Boucard, the president of the Art Society, explains that the exhibit was conceived following the UN Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing last September which dealt with poverty and disparities in education, health, economic participation, power sharing and decision-making, violence against women, the impact of armed and other conflicts on women, human rights, environment, national and international machineries and the significance of special attention to the girl-child.

Like Anette Steen Pedersen, the World Bank's Senior Adviser on Women's Issues, viewers will be able to sense what Pedersen expressed as a feeling of "proudness and strength, powerlessness and challenge that women worldwide feel and share," or what Regine Boucard calls "the

tangible bonding which strikes like a trusted breeze or a sand storm."

The works in this exhibition are divided in two groups, each with a beautiful catalog: the international collection and the Chinese collection. The international collection consists of video installations, sculptures, multimedia works and contemporary paintings on canvases, while the Chinese collection consists mostly of water colors.

It is hardly possible to review each type of artwork in this exhibit. The variety of media and the styles used are overwhelming. Some of the works stand out for their professional excellence, their application of advanced technology and for their conceptual statements.

Particularly eye-catching is Greek media artist Jenny Marketou's installation entitled *I can't take my eyes off you*. Marketou videotaped about fifty women's eyes in the World Bank's headquarters. Composed on one TV monitor/VCR installation which is placed in the lobby of the H-Building, the eyes keep passing and a voice continuously repeats "I can't take my eyes off you". The artist takes a special interest in how the media has

controlled the view of women's view of women's selves, their bodies and their consciousness. Curator Vasia Deliyanni comments that the work focuses on the importance of understanding women's struggle as part of a broader political and ethical movement. To realize the subjective and collective dimension of feminine economy, to preserve cultural diversity and to resist the different forms of social domination.

Fascinating is the installation *Between the Pregnant and Abortion* by Chinese Bing Hu who lives in America. Using broken light bulbs, cut bottle and latex paint, the installation is a combination of subtlety and firm determination. The artist says that she tries to "evoke female self-recognition and to be acknowledged as a woman." For the curator, the installation shocks and magnetizes at the same time. Vasia Deliyanni who finds the work so personal, intimate, but at the same time so familiar to every woman and every man, says it is organic, strong in color and texture, and powerful in meaning.

Interesting is also the installation *Life Lines* by Venezuelan born Heitrix Kohn who lives in the USA. Taking the circle as a symbol for the endless routine

that make up the lives of many women, the artist also uses it to indicate the restrictions that women face. By putting comments in the circle with women figures made in bronze, it furthermore links all the women in the world. "Sitting in compartments that represent rooms in their houses or a corner in their beds, these women fix their gazes on the nothingness of their trapped existences," she says.

The Sins of the New Millennium is an installation that features an eight-foot lowering booth inviting the viewer to enter and reflect on such issues as aggression, neglect, territorialization, impunity, complacency, wastefulness and willful ignorance. "The disequilibrium of our world requires that we change our patterns of behavior," states Greek-Canadian artist Tracy Essiglou.

Among the paintings on canvases, *Irreversible Passage* by Indonesian Astari Rasjmi was called "outstanding" by the Art Society's president. There was reportedly a buyer, but the artist could not be persuaded to sell her work. Using mixed media and expressive colors, the work features a woman's determination to embark on a voyage that takes her from the stereotyped concepts of a woman's place. Visualizing a woman's determination to follow the direction of her own conviction, the work features the shape of a vessel within a vagina, ready to escape through the narrow outlet and untying the strings that have held her until then. Astari is one of the three Indonesian artists selected by the Art Society out of 20 Indonesian entries. The other two are Dolorosa Sinaga with two mixed media works, *Untitled I* and *II*, and Yuniar Ernawati with *Anasipias*.

African-American

The section with paintings by African-American artists, curated by the chairman of the Art Department at the University of Wilberforce in Ohio, Willis Bing Davis, brings another flavor. To note is *The Awakening* by Carolyn L. Mazloom, a 4 ft x 5 ft quilt made of cotton, applique, beads and shells. It features a woman's face surrounded by

soft material which has a "1992" African touch.

Very impressive is the one by high school student made by Native American artist Rose Powhatan. Taking the shape of a penis, with a top resembling a lady's fingernail, it is made of wood, copper and the symbols on a totem are fire-engraved.

