

Good going in local art scene despite end to boom

JAKARTA (JP): At the end of this year, the economic crisis should have put paid to the decade-long Indonesian art boom.

Sales of Indonesian art at auctions in Singapore, Amsterdam and at home indicated the market had indeed reached saturation point. However most of the year was promising.

Indonesian artworks featured in many important international exhibitions held in Japan, Italy, Cuba, Denmark and Malaysia.

Several Indonesian art shows were held in Japan, a tradition from 1978 and the "Asian Art Show" at the Fukuoka Art Museum.

The Birth of Southeast Asian Art had important early works of Affandi, Sudjojono, Hendra, Agus Djaja and Srihadi Soedarsono's sketches depicting scenes during the war of independence.

Recently renewed interest in Asian art was also apparent in Australia and the United States.

Nindityo Adipurnomo and Agus Suwage were among five progressive Indonesian artists who participated in the Sixth Biennial of Havana from May to June.

International exhibitions such as Asia-Pacific Triennial in 1993 and 1996 in Brisbane owe much to curators in Japan, Southeast Asia and Australia who promoted the new "force" of the Asia Pacific and Southeast Asia.

Islam

In Italy, Hendrawan Riyanto, Anusapati and Setiawan Sabana exhibited in Modernities and Memories: Recent Works from the Islamic World, part of the La Biennale di Venezia XLVII.

This exhibition followed efforts of Moslem academics, including intellectual Hassan Uddin-Khan and a curator of a Jordanian museum, who believed Islamic art was under-represented.

They searched for artists whose works reflected strong roots in Moslem tradition.

In September, Indonesia won its first Philip Morris ASEAN Art Awards, when the work of Yogyakarta artist Yuswantoro Adi received the Grand Prize.

His *Masterpieces of Indonesia*, which shows the country's quintessential icons, all formed from Indonesian bills, was timely.

Art critic Agus Dermawan T. charged this year's selection was better than previous choices of a jury, headed by critic Jim Supangkat, which he said leaned to chaotic, rebellious and gruesome images, based on absurd and "pseudo-academic" criteria. His view led to a full-fledged debate. Yet numerous exhibitions by emerging artists did reflect a trend toward the absurd and an anti-aesthetic in contemporary Indonesian art, with politics and social change as the most popular themes.

Unlike theater, censorship is

By Amir Sidharta

not a common issue.

One exception to the political theme was *Di Stasiun* (At the station), a joint exhibition by young artists, mostly alumni of the Jakarta Institute for the Arts. It was held at the Gambir railway station, Central Jakarta, in November.

Station officials asked that one work, which listed the names of victims of railway accidents, be removed from the exhibition.

In April, more than 20 artists participated in Slot in the Box in Yogyakarta. Artworks on the theme of May's general election were provocative, but the show proceeded without incident.

Ceramic

It was an auspicious year for artists working in ceramics, although exhibitions remained limited.

TerraIndonesia 1997 featured the works of nine leading ceramists in December.

It presented the diversity of Indonesian ceramic art, from the crude to the refined, from expressive abstract works to social realist commentary.

Sculpture received less attention. Among the few notable events was a competition sponsored by the Ciputra Group.

Recipients of the Anugerah Adirupa CitraRaya 1997 awards were Haryadi Suroso and Budi L. Tobing, Yani Maryani and Ketut Winata. Their works will be models for larger-scale ones at a real estate project in Tangerang.

Painting exhibition From Mooi Indie to Persagi reflected the early style of Dutch artists in depicting the "natural beauty" of their kingdom's colony.

Persagi was the first association of Indonesian painters. The exhibition of the collection of the Pelita Harapan University museum runs to Jan. 26, and coincides with this year's 60th anniversary of Persagi's founding.

Commemorate exhibitions were held for two late Indonesian artists, Mochtar Apin, who died in 1993, and Achmad Sadali.

Many of Sadali's works were never shown publicly before his death in 1987.

Two fine art galleries opened this year. Works by Chagall and Picasso were in the inaugural exhibition of Dargø Gallery in Sanur, Bali.

A heated debate ensued regarding galleries, triggered by an article by Supangkat in the catalog for the inaugural exhibition at Galeripadi in Bandung.

Supangkat's article distinguished "alternative" galleries, such as Galeripadi, from "conventional" ones, and he inferred the latter was more likely to be involved in shady art dealings.

Critic Dermawan said Supangkat was biased.

Their debate was closely

linked to another issue raised in August — the role of the art critic and of curators.

In the past, Supangkat had questioned Dermawan's position as an art critic and his links with art dealers. In turn, Dermawan focused on Supangkat's bias as a curator, even accusing him of nepotism as a work by Alce Supangkat, Jim's wife, was included in one of his exhibitions.

Puritan

Dermawan is a widely known popular writer about the development of art, and credited with an important role in developing the Indonesian art market.

Supangkat is an academic die-hard focused on the promotion of contemporary Indonesian art.

He refuses to acknowledge Dermawan's role as a critic. Other writers have tended to disagree with Supangkat's puritanical views, including that art critics should not be involved at all in art dealing, although there is no consensus on what "dealing" covers.

Although Supangkat seems to have been losing the battle in the mass media this year, the Dutch government awarded him the 1997 Prince Claus award, along with Sardonio W. Kusumo and others, this month.

The debates showed the dearth of art critics amid the boom had led to an overlapping of roles of critic, curator and art consultant among a few individuals.

There has yet to be a definition and limit to the role of each.

But these few experts also need to realize the role of the public, and that an increasing number of art lovers is able to discern whether art criticism is perhaps colored by vested interest.

Amid the debates, the art world lost two senior figures. Critic Kusnadi passed away at his home in South Jakarta on 21 April from complications of typhoid and other illness. Veteran painter Haryadi, best known for *Malioboro Conversations* in the Sukarno collection, died in Yogyakarta in June at age 78.

Books

Several notable books on Indonesian art came out this year.

Supangkat's *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*, published by The Indonesian Fine Arts Foundation, received a tremendous response from the local art community.

Times Editions brought out *Masterpieces of Contemporary Indonesian Painters* by Esmeralda and Marc Bollansee.

A volume of Dede Eri Supria's paintings, *Into the Labyrinth*, was published by the Lontar Foundation in conjunction with the Jakarta Stock Exchange's fifth anniversary.

A book on the painter Widayat, written by Helena Spanjaard, is due this month,

Art Scene 1997

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 30, 1997



Galeri Santi

To The Village in an Andong by Erica Hesti Wahyuni. Galeri Santi hosted an exhibition of the young artist's whimsical works in Singapore.



JP/Art

Salim M. is an established painter whose works, including *Menuju Hutan Bunga* (Heading Toward the Flower Forest), were shown this year.

perhaps along with the exhibition of his works.

The Jakarta Museums and Restoration Bureau has commissioned Dermawan to publish a book commemorating 60 years of Indonesian painting, due out sometime next year.

Despite the increase in publication of books and research on Indonesian art, as well as the improvement of art museums with growing private support, scholarship is still limited.

Scarcity of expertise about art in the realization of the art boom contributed to a soaring number of art crimes (See box on Page 8).

On reflection, the slowing down of overly fast development may prove to be a blessing in disguise.

With the weakening art market, artists and exhibition organizers will be forced to reconsider their business strategies and set their prices at a more realistic level.

The exhibition of Jason Monet's paintings in Jakarta, for instance, registered an unreasonable threefold increase of prices compared to those of just a couple of years ago.

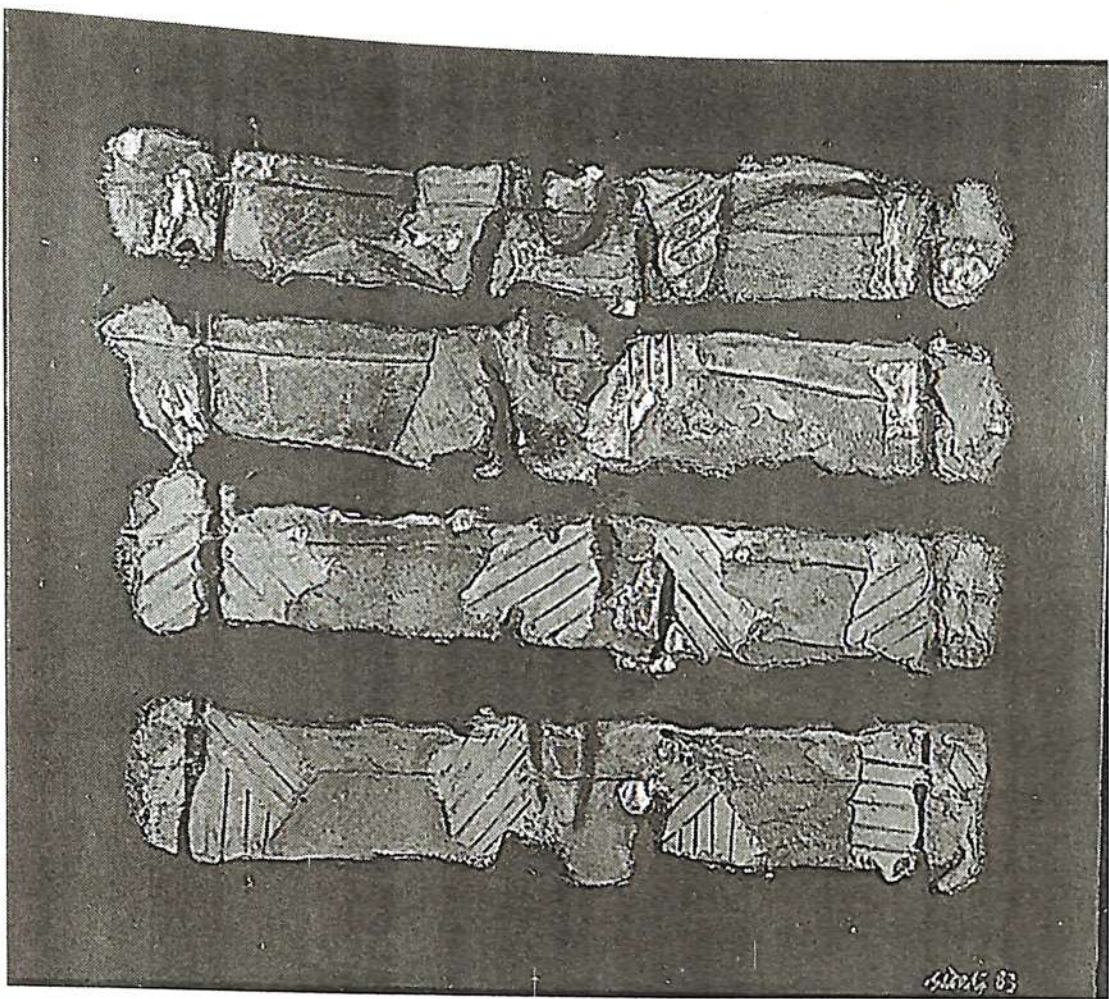
Other local artists have offered their paintings at prices double figures of last year, over-

valued even considering the artists' development during that time period.

Even in the auction scene, artists need to be more realistic in valuing their works (see accompanying article).

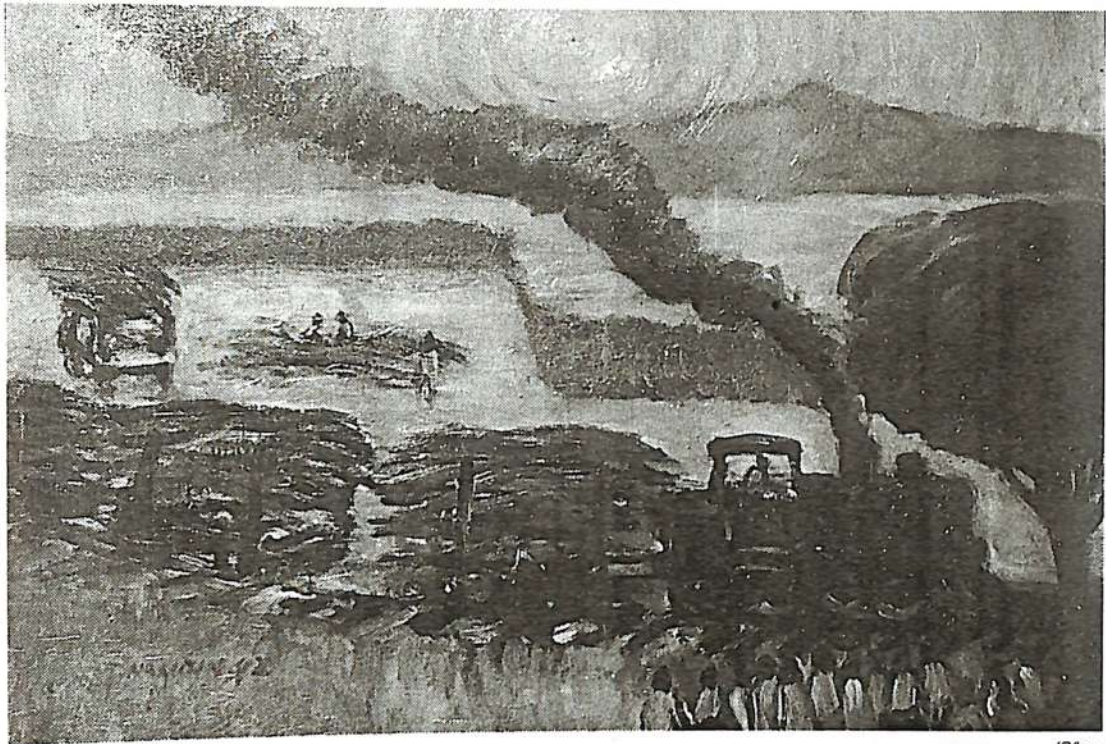
The economic crisis may offer them more time to develop artistically, and collectors will be forced to be more selective.

For art writers, critics and curators, next year will be the time to catch up with the lack of scholarship on Indonesian art, and simultaneously make inroads on the art thieves and forgers.



Edwin Gallery

Empat Batang dan Sisa Emas (Four Bars and Gold Remains) by Ahmad Sadali was among the works in a commemorative exhibition of the late painter.



JP/bay

Tino Sidin was best known in his lifetime for his dedication to teaching children. *Kereta Tebu* (above) was exhibited with his other works by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in April.

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JP/Agus Y. Ranu

Tentang Harga Diri (About Self-pride) by Dwi Aryo Prihutomo, among the crop of many emerging artists, who exhibited with a contemporary in Tanda Tanya (Question Mark) in August.



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