

Cliche, an ongoing photography exhibition explores the idea that beauty is not only skin-deep and that, in many ways, the idea — or ideal — should challenge our minds and other perfunctory senses. And whenever necessary, we should celebrate any flaws we find.

These semi-philosophical concepts are well understood and applied by marketing strategists of cosmetic companies in making their products highly distinctive in the ever-crowded market of beauty products.

While such distinction arguably reflects the true quality of the products, it is worth noting how certain images play crucial roles in defining these products. And what better way than involving the arts, either mainstream or edgy ones, in shaping the intended images?

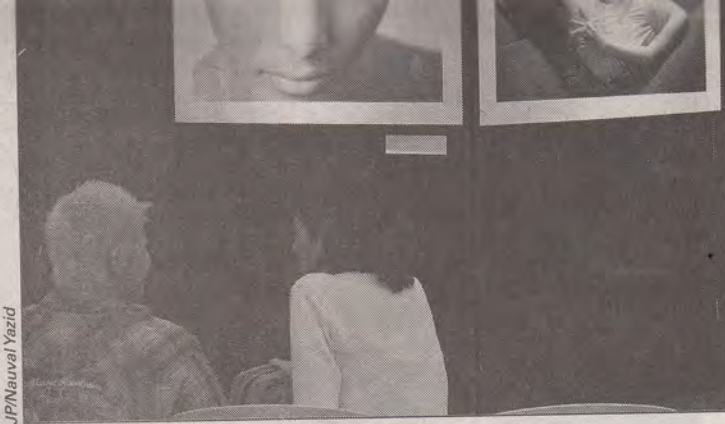
Mention cosmetic line MAC these days, and superstars Mary J. Blige and Elton John come to mind, as these celebrities work with MAC in their AIDS-awareness campaign.

On the other hand, Dove and its beauty-care lines invoke women with curvy figures, crooked teeth and thin hair who promote the products, something unthinkable 30 years ago.

Here at home, Lux soap attracts glamorous female stars and celebrities as the brand's endorsers. Recently, these same stars were featured in a series of short films on women, directed by four Indonesian women directors. These films met with unexpectedly mixed results: while they failed to promote the soap, they were considered a critical success artistically.

Yet, the tricky trap of marrying real art and artificial products does not deter many other players in the cosmetic industry.

The latest to follow the trend is Erhalogy, a skin-care product that recently launched its product by commissioning a photography exhibition, called *Ageposure* in Jakarta's upscale Senayan City mall. Running from May 24 to May 27 and curated by fashion editor Syahmedi Dean, the exhibit features the black-and-white work of five renowned



Two women chat leisurely under the ruminative, calm gaze of Samuel Sunanto's photos at the *Ageposure* exhibit.

local photographers.

Most of the photos, despite their being displayed in a promotional exhibit, surprisingly carry layers of depth and subtlety, and are worthy of being showcased at art galleries.

Perhaps in recognition of these artistic qualities, an auction was held right after the opening ceremony on Thursday night, with select photos selling at a minimum Rp 15 million — a considerable amount for admittedly mind-boggling works.

It is hard not to be captivated by the photos.

Samuel Sunanto showed his skill in treating his objects with calm, as reflected in his subdued photography. Taking the concept of "beauty" literally, as stated in the catalog, Samuel captured portraits with the smooth texture of fine lighting — a delight for sore eyes.

A similar comment can be made of Nurulita's works on facial expressions. The subjects of her photos struggle to bring out their emotions, and for those works of less convincing results, she overlays them with wavy lines produced by extra lighting.

However, the creams of the crop in the exhibit are the three remaining photographers: Keke Tumbuan, Heret Frasthio and Davy Linggar.

No words immediately arise to describe works of Keke, who is known for her eccentric style. Each of her photos are processed to create an X-ray like quality without a clear image of the actual subjects — except for the one vivid picture of a woman pinching her cheek.

In a great departure from

Keke's abstract world is Heret, who created dramatic shots of elderly people and those small in stature, each dressed in character costumes ranging from a mafia don to a boxer.

Heret shoots in dramatic lighting, bringing viewers to a darkened cinema screening a movie about the gangster underworld and illegal boxing

gals' work. Those of a narrow mind-set might condemn his photos as offensive. Yet, after some time staring at them, it is clear that Davy has merely toyed with perspective in photographing bodies, zooming in on some parts with simply bewildering results.

Be prepared to find yourself asking, "Is that a thigh? Is it a palm? Are they lips?" and many other questions upon viewing his works.

If these takes still inspire discomfort, then perhaps beauty beyond the conventional facade of glamour remains underappreciated.

At least the photographs displayed in *Ageposure* show that beauty, in many surprising ways, travels much further than skin deep.

*Ageposure: Aging through the eyes of 5 photographers runs from May 24-27 at Senayan City, Jakarta, and from June 14-June 17 at Istana Plaza, Bandung.*



A woman observes two photos by Heret Frasthio, which show an elderly man dressed as a weightlifter (right) and a woman dressed as a queen. The photos are part of the *Ageposure: Aging through the eyes of 5 photographers* exhibition, commissioned by skin-care producer Erhalogy, on display at Senayan City.