

Kolom : Potpourri

**Title : Rondeau : Photography
beyond the frame**

Penulis : Carla Bianpoen

**Media : Jakarta Post, Monday may 21,
2007**

Rondeau: Photography beyond the frame

Carla Bianpoen
Contributor/Jakarta

In 1859, the French poet and critic Charles Baudelaire opined that the camera lens left no room for imagination. Indeed, at the time, photography was considered only as a tool to capture reality, evidence, the truth.

"Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proved when we're shown a photograph of it," wrote American philosopher and critical thinker Susan Sontag in *On Photography*.

But this is merely one dimension to photography.

As witnessed in the various exhibitions on photography here, the flight of photography to the highest levels of imagination has provoked a stunning new way of seeing. This was manifest, for example, in Miao Xiaochun's photography and video exhibit that reexamined Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* using digital technology.

The photography of renowned Gérard Rondeau, currently on show at the National Gallery, Central Jakarta, owes its uniqueness to the multifaceted dimension of his works and the omission of artificial lighting.

Titled *Libre Journal de Jakarta: Portraits et Autres Voyages* (Free diary of Jakarta: Portraits and other journeys), the exhibition is part of the ongoing *Le Printemps*

Français (French Spring festival) organized by the Centre Culturel Français, and runs through May 25.

While his portraits of leading personae in French art and culture are excellent, for the local public it would be difficult to judge whether the photographs also reflect the character of the subject in question, due to our unfamiliarity with that social context.

Not many people would, for instance, know about the Egyptian-born French writer Albert Cossery, who lived in the same hotel room for over 50 years. However, the portrait of the couturier Jean Paul Gaultier in a simple black shirt, adorned with earrings and a bracelet while posing for the camera, does give a sense of fashion and the fashionable.

Conversely, Rondeau's portraits of Indonesian figures in art and culture may have suffered from a lack of in-depth knowledge about the significance of his subjects, or may have been made to balance the heavyweights of the French portraiture.

To feature Ayu Utami against the background of a frangipani tree, for instance, makes a niche photo, but does not bring out the revolutionary character of the author of the controversial novel, *Saman*.

Meanwhile, Indonesian photographer Firman Ichsan did not recognize himself in the portrait taken by Rondeau, and another of the playwright-dramatist couple, Nano and Ratna Riantiarno, gave an

impression of Ratna as a hanger-on — whereas she is instrumental in the many successes of their theater company, Teater Koma.

Of course, impressions are not to be disputed, as Rondeau is a photographer who looks with an inner eye. This is particularly evident in the pictures of the Cathedral of Rheims in France, which he took in 1988.

On that particular day at dusk, the sky was dark and thunder echoed over the fields. Then the sky suddenly turned white as a flock of birds passed. Rondeau said he immediately set his camera at low speed to capture the dancing movements of the birds, producing an unusual image that has the quality of graphic art.

A sense of graphics is also seen in his pictures of Jakarta and the architecture of buildings that have existed for over a hundred years. Juxtaposing such pictures with a newly erected mosque gives the viewer a sense of time and history, evoking a mood for reflection.

The same mood is also found in his photograph of the grave of Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Indonesia's best-known novelist and author of the *Buru Quartet*, with blurred trees in the background. It evokes a sense of the transient to which even Pramoedya, who survived persecution, imprisonment and censorship, ultimately had to submit.

Gérard Rondeau is a well-known photographer in the