

# Artists paint the

# dark side of military

Artists over the last five years have represented the military through painting, sculpture, graphic-art and installation but violence and cruelty has most often been the subject of discourse.

The latest exhibition to excoriate the military was *Five-year Reform Reflection* held in May by the Jakarta Art Council in Galeri Cipta II, Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM). Displaying works such as Rahmad Jabrail's *DOM* (military operation zone), Arahmaiani's *Tetasan Darah 1998* (bloodshed) and Subagio's *Terbelunggu* (shackled).

The graphic works of New Fine Art Movement exponent FX Harsono, exhibited at the Indonesian National Gallery early in June were similarly scathing, especially the "Rp 100 stamp series", *Republik Indochoas*, which depicted security officers chasing a student protester and armed with clubs, and the warning: "Violence is no solution".

In July 2002 at Bentara Budaya Jakarta, artist Dadang Christanto, who is currently teaching in Australia, exhibited two installations, *Cannibalism* and *They Give Evidence*.

The installation's graphic nature and its contempt of the

military provoked outrage among the public. The Nadi Gallery in Jakarta presented a series of paintings by Heri Dono called "pistols," last year.

These artists claim to represent ordinary people. Their manner may be confrontational but they believe it is a way to stop the military's violation of human rights. Before the *reformasi* period they would rarely have dared to make such statements.

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Merwan Yusuf of the Jakarta Art Council says that at the beginning of the reform movement in 1998, artists portrayed students as heroes and the military as villains. Later, after pressuring president Soeharto to resign, the students lost the respect of artists as they had become internally divided.

Fine art that debases the military has been described by the historian, Dr. Anhar Gonggong, as a manifestation of the collective memory of society at large. He says this anti-military memory has

accumulated since the 1970s, when the armed forces became the New Order's tool against civilians.

The artist, Suhardi (Hardi), was arrested by Jakarta military authorities in 1978 after displaying his self-portrait *Presiden RI Tahun 2001, Suhardi* at TIM. In the picture he was dressed in the formal style of first president Sukarno, cheekily suggesting that in 2001 he could be president.

Fortunately, then vice president Adam Malik protested the arrest, which he said was a violation of human rights, and Hardi was later released.

But in the 1980s Hardi's paintings were still concerned with power abuse and he painted the police mercilessly driving away newspaper vendors in the street.

"Soldiers and policemen must change their behavior to win public sympathy," said Anhar Gonggong in a recent seminar. He argued that while no country could be strong without mighty military forces, the military could never be strong without public trust.

Indonesian fine art history shows that during the period of struggle for independence, artists and freedom fighters joined forces. This was expressed in Hendra Gunawan's



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*Pengantin Revolusi* (Revolution Wedding) by Hendra Gunawan.

oil paintings *Pengantin Revolusi* (revolution wedding) and *Pengungsian* (evacuation), now in the collection of the Jakarta Fine Art Museum, and Affandi's *Laskar Mengatur Siasat* (militia drafting strategy).

Henk Ngantung also represented the military in a series of sketches illustrating the Indonesian National Army engaged in a series of drills in 1947.

Sudjana Kerton illustrated

the transfer of power, from the Dutch to the Republic of Indonesia, in his sketches of the Linggarjati Round Table Conference in West Java in 1949. And Sukarno commissioned the artist, Dullah, to paint

guerrillas reporting for duty. Artists once enjoyed an affable relationship with soldiers. But it is clear that they now perceive the military in a less favorable light, and they are not afraid to speak out.