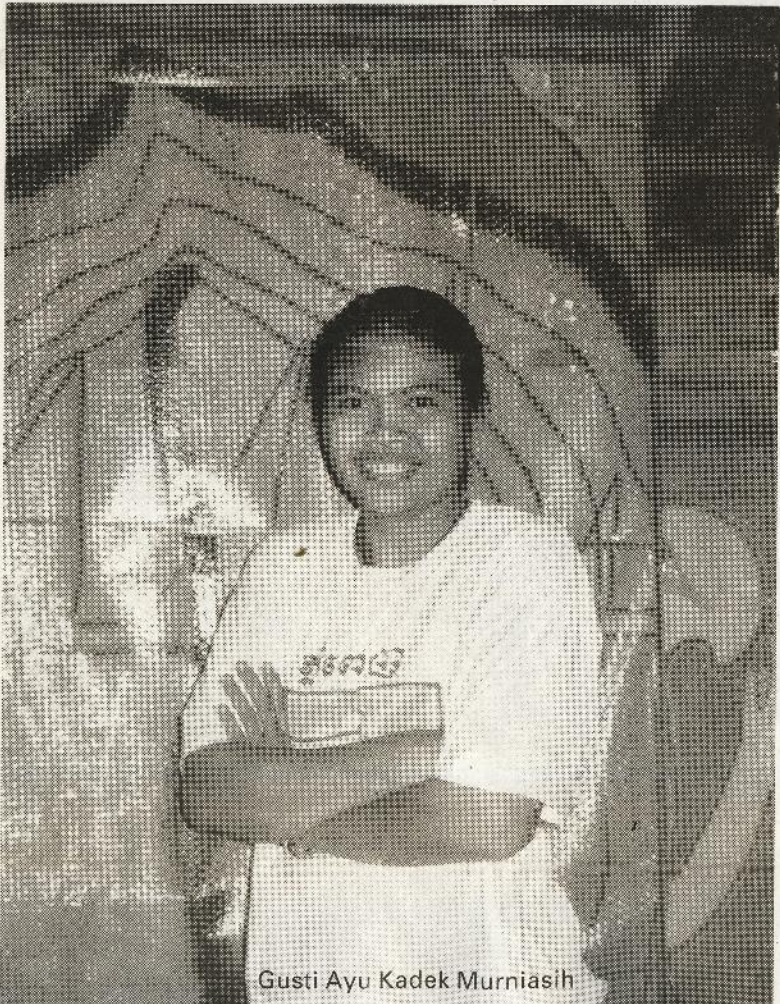


# Artists put private parts on show



Gusti Ayu Kadek Murniasih

**Jagadhita**  
Denpasar

Art is the conscious use of the imagination, often for self-expression. As a creative ability it is encouraged, yet when the work itself is confrontational, the public reacts quickly against it. A recent exhibition in Sanur has caused the kind of debate that has both promoted and relegated art over the years.

The 10 artists responsible for the show at the 10 Fine Art Gallery, Sanur, defended it as an attempt at honesty. A painting of a penis, which is included among other works of a sexual nature, is hardly pornographic, they say.

"Our aim is to introduce ourselves frankly and openly," said I Made Dolar Astawa, one of the artists.

Reviews have been mixed, with criticism coming from within the art community itself, including claims that the work is obscene.

Dolar defends the integrity

of his work, recalling that while a photograph was adequate source material at the start, closer inspection was necessary to fill in the details.

"It is art? Well, that's up to the viewer to decide. If people have dirty minds, (they call it pornography) even though the image they see is of a man who is properly dressed," he said.

Many painters in Bali are concerned with the female form but few paint male nudes.

This condition was one of the reasons why the 10 artists were determined to put some of their private parts on public display, so to speak. Dolar acknowledges that I Made Romi Sukadana had arrived at the idea for the show in February.

Artist Gusti Ayu Kadek Murniasih painted her own vagina for the exhibition. While Murniasih, who lives in Pengosekan village, Ubud, apologized for having to mention the "unmentionable" but not for her art work, "The subject of my paintings this year is, excuse me, the penis," she said.

In one of her works, she shows a person having intercourse. The artist, who

was born in Negara, says she has her own reasons for exploring sexuality.

"I was raped by my own father when I was seven," she said.

Again painting is used to explore an intensely personal or private matter.

"I paint like this to get it out of my mind — and ease my heartache. If I don't do it, I feel like I'm being choked," she said.

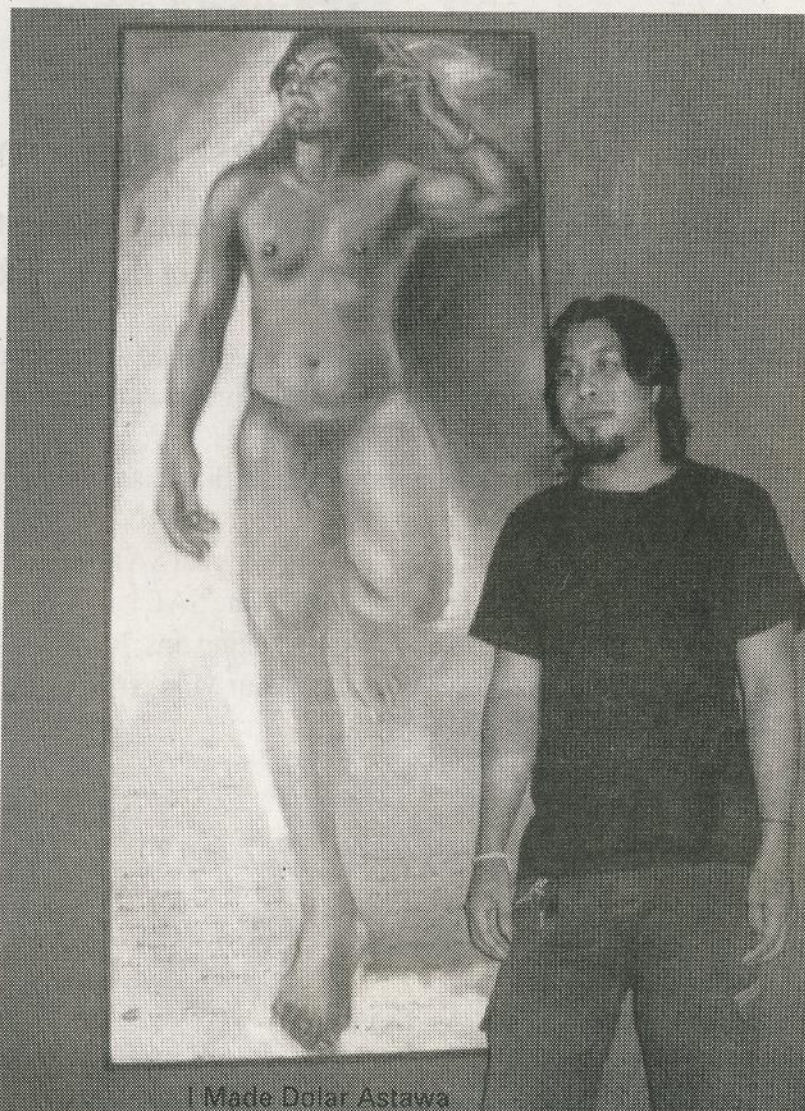
She was fond of painting as a child, but the daughter of a farmer didn't have much access to art.

"As a little girl, I loved to paint, but I started painting seriously only after I got married," she said.

However, Murniasih's husband did not fully support her talent and their marriage ended after five years as she was unable to conceive a child.

Murniasih, 38, recalls the most spectacular work of her career.

"The work is actually a 'painting' of my vagina made entirely of my own pubic hair. It took me over 20 years to collect enough," she said. For any interested parties, the asking price is Rp 40 million (about US\$4,200). Yes, but is it art?.



I Made Dolar Astawa