

'I, Chairil, and I':

Between literature and the visual arts

"I want to live another thousand years" and the battle cry "*Bung, Ayo Bung!*" are slogans that have braved the change of time. They are slogans once said by no less than Chairil Anwar (1922-1949), the country's preeminent icon considered to have released poetry from the bonds of traditional forms and language.

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While virtually everyone here knows the first line comes from Chairil's renowned poem *Aku*, written during the Japanese occupation, not everyone is aware that "*Ayo Bung*" was Chairil's slogan written on a poster made by Affandi, one of Indonesia's most prominent painters.

Fifty-six years after Chairil Anwar's untimely death at the age of 27, and 83 years after his birth on April 28, 1922, 25 artists have responded to Nadi Gallery and curator Enin Supriyanto's invitation to pick up the thread that linked the poet Chairil Anwar to the visual arts of his time.

The theme *Aku, Chairil, dan Aku* (I, Chairil, and I) highlights Chairil Anwar's poem *Aku*, which has a distinct focus on the "I". But somehow it leaves space for the artists to focus on his or her own individual and even go beyond that. And so it happened.

Some have been inspired by the physical image of Chairil Anwar as it is known to the public. Agus Suwage, for instance, accentuates the feature of chain-smoking by using a blend of charcoal and nicotine in his drawing *Aku Ingin Hidup Seribu Tahun Lagi #2*, while his installa-



Sia-sia (In Vain) by Dolorosa Sinaga



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*Aku Ingin Hidup Seribu Tahun Lagi
#2* by Agus Suwage

Aku (Me)
by Dede Eri Supria



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tion of the same title #1 seems to ridicule the health risk of smoking and the fallacy of wanting to live another thousand years. It consists of a white-colored *becak* where the passengers' seats have been transformed into a container filled with cigarette butts collected during the many months of preparation.

Dipo Andy repeats the familiar pondering Chairil image in various colors on 27 pages, focusing on the question "Who and what is an artist?" It is titled *Mus-haf Garis 27 Baris*, acrylic on paper.

In yet another interpretation, Rosid's *Aku=Penyair* features inflated fingers holding Chairil's photographic image.

The "I" in Chairil's famous poem is easily linked to the "I" that colors virtually every work of art here. As so often is the case, the "I" that starts from the personal is taken to the social, the political and even universal truths.

Astari Rasjid uses her own image to mock legal procedures. In *Superhero Babe* she puts her-

self in a policeman's uniform to indicate the battle she is fighting in a court case and the condescendence she experiences as a woman. Is there a place for women, she seems to ask in *Eveready Babe*, depicting herself as a modern secretary wearing a traditional sarong and *kebaya*, a pencil between her lips, but her arms laden with household goods.

Laksmi Sitaesmi's *Tentang Kakiku* (About my Foot) depicts a leg wearing a high-heeled shoe, indicating that social rules still hold her in bondage and only in the intimacy of meditation can she be herself, as depicted in her nude figure titled *Yoga*.

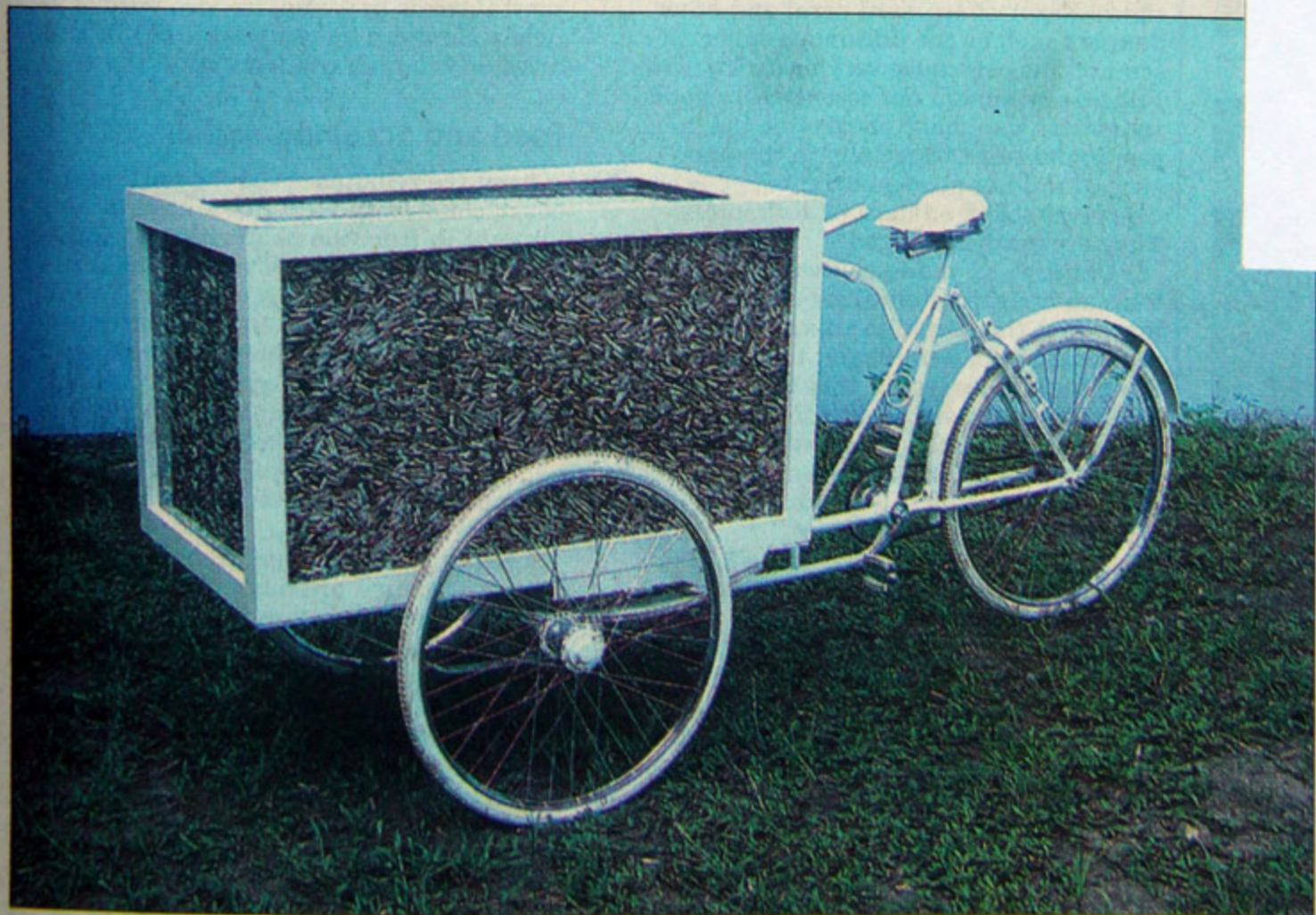
Dede Eri Supria's *Aku* portrays the urban worker, shackled in the working rhythm of the metropolis. It also suggests the worker whose hard work is no guarantee for a life free from poverty.

The "I" in Pintor Sirait's *Terror-Beauty* is an exploration in which the artist comes to the conclusion that there are always

two sides to a coin.

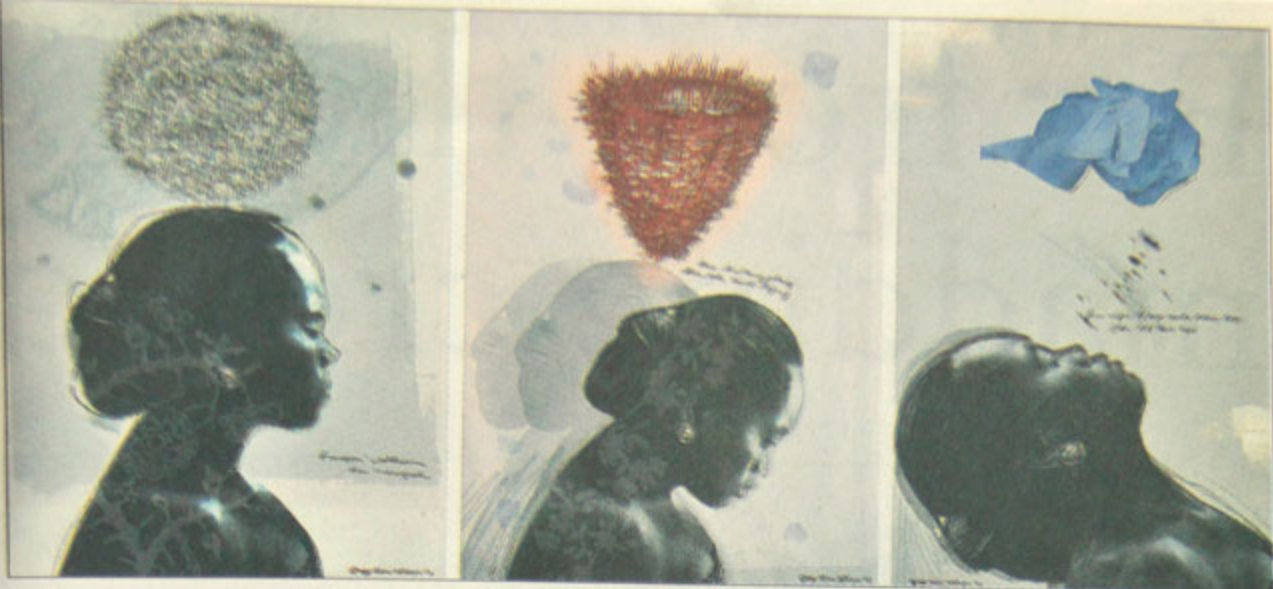
Depicting an image of himself in duo against a plate of stainless steel perforated with bullet holes, his work evokes a sense of horror, at the same time invoking a sense of veneration, just like the heroic lines of Chairil's *Aku: Though bullets should pierce my skin/I shall still strike and march forth/Wounds and poison shall I take aflee. Aflee/'Til the pain and pang should disappear/And I should care even less/I want to live for another thousand years.*

On the other hand, Ong Hari Wahyu, who depicts a woman in three different poses, suggest that Chairil's *Aku* was neither an ode to national independence nor a symbol of heroic intentions. What for many people looks



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Aku Ingin Hidup Seribu Tahun Lagi #1 (I hope to live 1,000 years) by Agus Suwage



Aku by Ong Hari Wahyu

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Mus-haf Garis 27 Baris by Dipo Andy

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like a call for the people to fight for freedom (from the colonists), may have been a consolation to a loved one. *If my time should come/let no one be saddened/not even you/ and a solemn promise for he wants to live for another thousand years.*

Budi Kustarto seems to see the "I" disappearing and separating the head from its body, and he tries to bring it back in *Selamatkan* (Save it).

In an act of diversion, the sculptor Dolorosa Sinaga takes Chairil's poem *Sia-sia* (In Vain) as her lead. Here one feels the alienation so poignant in modern life. Depicting a man and a woman, each sitting at the opposite ends of a bank, one is reminded of the lines: *One day we were together/but remained far apart/Oh! My unyielding heart/now damned and torn in solitude.*

Other artists participating in the exhibition are Arie Dyanto, AS Kurnia, Danarto, Dikdik Sayahdikumullah, Diyanto, Frans Nadjira, Galam Zulkifli, Pande Ketut Taman, S. Malela Maharagararie, S. Teddy D., Tisna Sanjaya, Ugo Untoro, Yani Halim, and Yuli Pravitno.

I, Chairil, and I,
at Nadi Gallery until May 10.
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Superhero Babe by Astari Rasjid

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