

Carving success

out of stone

Doelkamid Jayaprana's elegant stone house stands out among the houses of sculptors in Prumpung village, Muntilan, in Magelang regency: Hanging on the walls of his verandah are media clippings about him and his work.

Inside, a striking photo collection of him with numerous figures of high rank, from regents to presidents, decorates his living room. One is a photograph of him presenting a small statue to President Megawati Soekarnoputri.

Doelkamid, 64, is known as a pioneer in the art of stone sculpting, which has developed into a big business in Muntilan.

"There have been 600 such sculptors in Muntilan and its surrounding areas since I began the business in 1953," said the artist.

Prumpung village has, for centuries, been famous for its stone-based cottage industry, with products ranging from tombstones to *lesung*, a mortar for grinding rice. Sculpture began only in the early 1950s, and one of its early pioneers was Doelkamid's father, Salim Djayaprawiro.

"I was still in elementary school when I decided to become a sculptor. My father would encourage me to go and see Borobudur Temple for inspiration," he recalled.

So he would go to the famed ancient Buddhist temple with his relatives, Kasrin Indroprayono and Ali Rahmat.

"We used to walk the 13 kilometers to the temple," said Doelkamid.

He learned how to carve stone from his father and, inspired by the temple, his first sculpture was a bust of Buddha. Often, he sculpted frogs — the animal he loved to catch and keep in a glass jar.

The piece he considers monumental among his early work is the bust of General Sudirman, one of Indonesia's

military greats; he still has it now.

As he sharpened his skills, people bought his work and orders began to come in.

Bambang M

Contributor
Muntilan, Central Java

He recalled his neighbors strongly objected to his unconventional choice of art.

"Why should you make statues? Do you worship statues?" an angry neighbor once attacked him verbally.

But the criticism failed to discourage Doelkamid.

The most memorable order came in 1960 when he became an arts and crafts teacher in Yogyakarta: Gen. Gatot Subroto asked for an entrance gate for his villa in the cool Central Java town of Ungaran.

"Pak Gatot told me my work was good and encouraged me to go further," Doelkamid said. He took the



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DOELKAMID JAYAPRANA

encouragement so much to heart that he quit his job as a teacher and founded a workshop he called Sandjaya.

In his quest to sharpen his already vast knowledge and skills, he visited more temples in Central and East Java.

His business boomed after then-president Sukarno ordered a tombstone for Sunan Kalijaga in Demak, Central Java, in 1965. Sunan Kalijaga was one of the propagators of Islam on Java.

"I experienced something spiritual when I was doing the project: I found the stones I had arranged in a mysterious pile the next morning. So I meditated and asked for Sunan Kalijaga's permission to carry out the work, and after that, nothing happened any more," he said. He claimed his hair stood on end, while he was telling this story to *The Jakarta Post*.

As his business flourished, he recruited craftsmen from among his neighbors. Many of them later quit and started their own businesses after they had learned the craft

from him, and the stone sculpture business bloomed throughout Muntilan.

Among his former craftsmen are Warsito, owner of the Kawulo Jaya workshop and Sisuri, owner of the Selogiri workshop — thanks to Doelkamid's tutelage, both are now famous sculptors in their own right.

Doelkamid's sculptures can be found in major cities across Java, with the entrance gates of 30 towns and cities to his credit. His other major pieces are the gate to Surabaya's Juanda Airport, the relief of Gen. Sudirman in Purbalingga, Central Java, and the gate to Sukarno's cemetery in Blitar, East Java. The statue of Hindu god Vishnu riding atop a mythical *garuda* bird at the residence of former president Soeharto on Jl. Cendana, Jakarta, is also his work, and his sculptures also decorate Indonesian embassies around the world.

For Doelkamid, the most difficult pieces to make are Buddha in meditation and

Queen Ken Dedes of ancient Singasari, who has become an icon of beauty.

"Before making the Buddha statue, I will pray in front of a model statue," said Doelkamid, who believes he is a descendant of the sculptors and craftsmen who built Borobudur Temple.

His dedication to sculpture and his talent have won him a total of 14 awards, including an award from the Magelang administration for giving the regency a good image and the Upakarti award that was presented by President Soeharto in 1990 for his dedication to the arts.

"The awards have given credence to the old adage that a good sculptor enjoys the favor of powerful officials," he said, looking at the numerous photographs of himself with various politicians.

In fact, sculpting statues is not all Doelkamid does — he also carves replicas of temples. So far, he has made replicas of 10 temples, including the replica of Borobudur at Taman Mini Indonesia Indah in Jakarta and that of Gedongsongo Temple at Tugu Rejo, Semarang.

Temple replicas require the highest level of skill and expertise for stone sculptors as it involves the immensely complicated task of arranging thousands of stones into a perfect, harmonious structure. Doelkamid meditates at the original temple before starting on its replica.

"Now, I know that our ancestors who built the temples must have been brilliant. Just imagine — they managed to build such sophisticated structures using only simple tools," he said.

Although fellow sculptors call him *empu*, an honorific title meaning "master craftsman", Doelkamid has only just begun — and has a master work in the planning: To build a miniature museum at his home that tells the story of his life.