

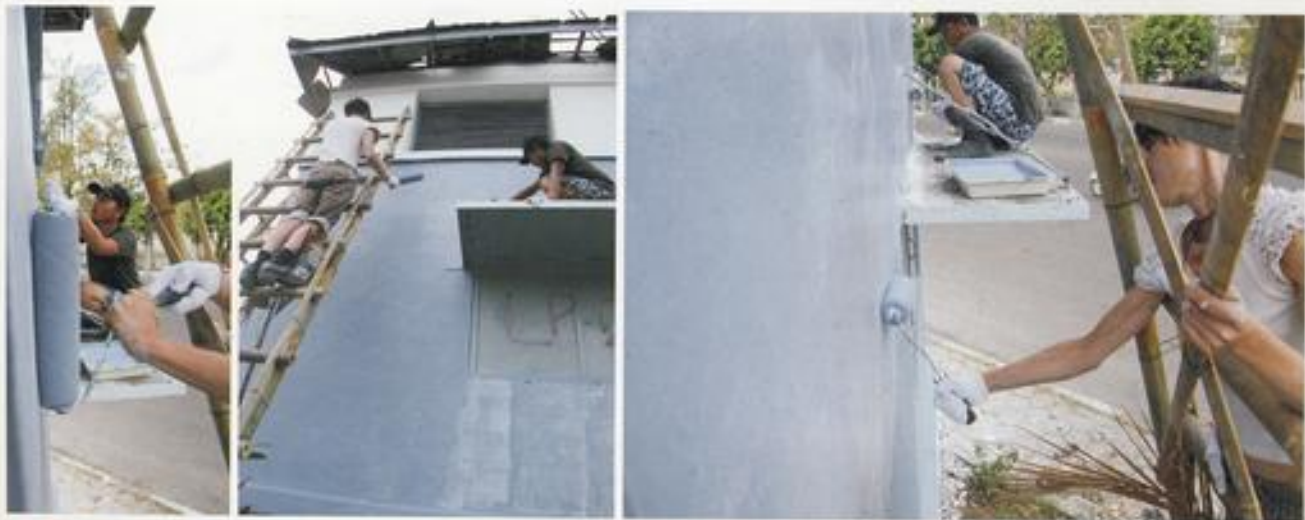


## CAPTIVE HEARTS

LOCATION> KOTA BARU | ARTIST> CAROLYN RYDER COOLEY

*When Megan first told me about Indonesia we hardly knew each other. As we stood in the doorway at Southern Exposure Gallery she showed me photographs of puppets, beaches, volcanoes, monkey forests and a group of fringe artists who lived in a place called Yogyakarta. A year later I was asked to join the mural exchange. Of course I wanted to participate, except for one thing: I wasn't a muralist. Megan said it didn't matter, the project was about public art, collaboration and exchange.*

*Life in San Francisco is hectic. I stashed the project in a drawer labeled "escape fantasies" with no inkling of how profound the experience would be. Then one day it was finally happening. A frenzy of last minute arrangements had to be made like begging for a leave of absence from work and scraping together the necessary supplies. The entire night before departure was an obsessive compulsive nightmare of packing and re-packing. I stayed up all night, played a show the next day, stumbled through the chaos of San Francisco Gay Pride festivities and arrived at the airport in a sleep deprived daze, still in disbelief that the trip was in motion.*



*Arriving in Yogyakarta felt like stepping into an entirely new and enchanted world. Dissonant prayers swirled through the air on loud speakers as we were enveloped in a landscape of urban rice fields, horned fruits, mysterious plants, bizarre dress codes, bicycle buggies, swarms of mopeds, horse drawn carriages and an entire civilization of birds living in elaborate cages. How quickly I became infatuated with Indonesia. I couldn't help myself, it was like nothing I had ever known before.*



*The Yogyakarta mural exchange was incredibly challenging and changed the course of my life. The task of painting a multi-dimensional mural on a highly visible building as the entire city watched was terrifying. After visiting the bird market where thousands of feathered creatures are bought and sold every day, I decided to work with the theme of birds and bird cages. I wanted to illustrate the contrast between freedom and captivity in relation to first world-third world politics. At first I attempted to turn the entire site into a giant bird cage, but as time wore on I realized how depressing that would be for people in the neighborhood to look at.*

*After much deliberation I decided to paint birds in the foreground with cages looming behind them. I wanted to convey a sense of tension and fragility. The birds are free, but the cages are still there. The accompanying text, printed in English and Indonesian, imparts a feeling of release: "Captive Hearts Fly Free, Tawanan Hati Terbang Bebas". While painting this mural I thought a lot about why people put birds in cages. Perhaps looking at caged animals enables us to feel more free.*







Everyday people stopped by the mural site with cameras, questions and helping hands. Painting the mural was like the opposite of being a tourist. Instead of me taking the pictures, I was the subject of everyone else's photographs. I was the spectacle, the other, the strange girl in unconventionally short skirts and tank tops working outside in the blazing sun atop a rickety bamboo ladder. Yet despite all my peculiarities, the people of Yogya were curious and accepting.

Arya painted morning 'til night with me at the electric box, and many others made magical contributions including Eddie, Chodit, Alicia, Sam, Mie and Ingvild. I was amazed by the skill and talent of the Apotik artists and by their ceaseless resourcefulness and hospitality. I experienced many levels of humanity in Indonesia that were missing in the U.S. and it was incredibly hard to come home. Then, when it was time for Apotik to come to San Francisco, Homeland Security made it so difficult for them to get visas that they almost didn't make it. After all the welcoming and kindness we had received in Yogya, the behavior of our government towards the Indonesians was painful to witness. The San Francisco murals painted by Apotik include ominous images of consumerism, homelessness and greed. These are daring pictures to paint in a city where murals tend to be positive and uplifting. I want to thank all the Apotik artists and their friends for being courageous, brilliant and speaking the truth through art. Thank you thank you thank you, sama-sama will live forever in my heart as a truly incredible phenomenon.

Throughout the sama-sama project I felt challenged by gender in ways that I was totally unprepared for and unable to process until recently. In San Francisco it's possible to redefine, reclaim or reject gender identity, which has enabled me to reach new levels of personal expression. In Indonesia I felt like a female artist again, lost in a country of male artists. All aspects of my work suddenly felt feminine, from palette to content, from style to approach. This made collaborating with Apotik challenging and confusing. Secretly I longed to be one of the guys. I wanted to have their skills and confidence, and share their relationship to super heroes, politics, history and comics. Although four of the CAMP artists were women, we had difficulty addressing the gender issue within our group and supporting each other through it.



*As women, we were coming from a different background of training, approach and experience. For example, we were working with optimistic imagery such as rainbows, birds, flowers and swirly hair-do's. On the other hand, our approach was more avant-garde, we were working with expressionism, abstraction, minimalism and retro-decorative designs and colors.*

*Meanwhile the guys were painting mutated bodies, graphically anti-capitalist images and deranged superhero figures. Their lines were smaller, lighter and more detailed, their approach was aggressive and confident. Although I was amazed by all the art and creative energy in Indonesia, I felt like half of the picture was missing due to the lack of visible women artists and I want to encourage women to make more public art throughout Indonesia and beyond.*

