

Dolorosa Sinaga expresses authentic voice of humankind

On Oct. 10, Dolorosa Sinaga's first-ever solo exhibition was opened at the Galeri Nasional Indonesia. This prestigious exhibit of sculptures, running through Oct. 31, is an important statement by an artist who is taking her place among the growing body of modern artists whose utterance is valid, not so much as an imitation of what man has already done or is doing, but as the authentic voice of womankind.

It is the plainspoken-ness of elemental woman, the maternal viewpoint that speaks through the sculptures depicting female bodies while dismissing any allegiance to alluring or sophisticated sex.

Through Dolorosa's female bodies, humanity and humankind find substance. Philosopher and member of the literati, Toeti Heraty, relates this to "a new metaphysics of freedom and recreation." Through Dolorosa's art, the "I" can speak, she says.

One is struck by the recurrence and persistence of focus in the artist's works that centers on the human body in its female representation. Blending tension and a touch of drama, the artist's talent, sensitivity and skill manage to provoke an intense sense of the depths of women's suffering.

Sculpting is an act of tension, she once said. It is one that never breaks, as evident in all the sculptures in this

outstanding exhibition. Showing the process of the artist's personal and professional maturing, the display also denotes the artist's concept of life.

Her early works already denoted her special interest in women figures as a metaphor for the human experience, although the mode she applied tended towards the abstract. Following her personal development, her style changed. She became more expressive, capturing the particular and accidental with minute exactness.

Works of the early 1990s which depicted women caged in an enclosure, like in *Olympia*, or harrowing, lifeless figures like that in *Tragic Tendency* or just suppressing

suf-
fer-
ing, like
in *Wail-
ing*, made
way for un-
dulating, mov-
ing lines represent-
ing the emotional
waves of the psyche.

Resistente (1996),
may have been the
turning point. Depict-
ing a woman desper-
ately trying to squeeze
out the pain in her
breast with one hand,
while the other hand
is clenched into a
fist, the sculpture
stands as a symbol
of enduring
strength, signaling
resurrection out of
the depths of pain.



but build strength
through joining
hands, is expres-
sed in the group-
ing of women in
her large-size
sculptures. Built
up by tension and
personal convic-
tion after the
many forms of
violence revealed
in 1998, *Lawan
Kekerasan* (1999)
is created, show-
ing the Matriarch
shielding women
in a protective
embrace, trying
to link the past
with the
future.

Solidarita
(2000) pre-
sents women
bare
foot

Galeri Nasional Indonesia

Dolorosa Sinaga stages her first-ever solo exhibition at Galeri Nasional Indonesia. One of her latest works on display is the bronze *Avante* sculpture.

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There is an unmistakable similarity with the works of Käthe Kollwitz, the phenomenal German Expressionist graphic artist and sculptor, whose talent as a dramatic artist evoked human emotions through subtle gestures and facial expressions. In a way, one can sense Dolorosa flowing into the image of Kollwitz.

"It is Käthe Kollwitz who inspired me to focus on women as the center of humankind," says Dolo, revealing that she had felt a strange attraction to Kollwitz from the time she began

studying sculpture.

Honoring Kollwitz for this are two sculptures titled *Homage to Käthe Kollwitz*, near replica's of Kollwitz's own self-portraits of 1925 and 1934.

Dolorosa, like Kollwitz, grew up in an atmosphere of intense religious feeling. They both rebelled against the conventional, and developed a strong social consciousness, which they express in the urge to voice the basic maternal attitude.

Yet, while Kollwitz's main preoccupation was with suffering and death, Dolorosa's oeuvre speaks of a variety of emotions, including that of joy. This is particularly highlighted in the special space in the exhibition dedicated to the dancing bodies. While the Kollwitz repertoire is weighted towards the somber side alone, Dolorosa includes life

in its full and comprehensive dynamics.

The atrocities under the Soeharto regime, the kidnapping of activists, the killing of students, the dynamic standing up of women in a show of unprecedented solidarity against violence, her involvement in the care of family members of missing persons or victims of violence, all these left important traces as she matured personally and professionally.

Her sculptures became more expressive, not in the facial way, but rather in the lines shaking the body on the waves of inner emotions, as evident in *Mother and the Dead Child* (1999), *At the Edge of Hope* and *The Grief*, a shattering study of tension and the movement of mourners between anger and grief.

The need for women to not indulge in suffering and pain,

joining hands in a demonstration of unified dynamics while *Gerak Berlawanan* (2001) speaks of determination in the women in seated, yet swinging, positions, with their mouths open to make their voices heard.

Is this exhibition the story of women, as *Cerita Perempuan* (2001), the sculpture with the same title, may suggest? There seems to be no doubt about that, for as the sculpture emphasizes, it encompasses all women. Some are demanding, and others are begging, but all stand firm on both feet emanating determination. The dynamics brought out in *Avante* (2001) seem to follow suit.

It took Dolorosa two decades of professional practice to hold a solo exhibition. It is in every respect worth the long wait.