

Exhibition marks Made

Djirna's turning point

Balinese artist Made Djirna is not a new name in the world of Indonesian art. He is perhaps best known for his paintings of female figures formed using curvilinear shapes in a simple palette of red, white and black and gritty sand-like texture on terracotta background which have been popular since the mid-1990s.

Yet, his work dating back to the late 1980s has been recognized in various exhibitions. Among others, his piece *Life in Our Surrounding* was included in Singapore Art Museum's Soul Ties exhibition (1999) and his painting *Inspirasi dari Seni Aborigin* (Inspiration from Aboriginal Arts, 1988) is a significant artwork in Crossing Boundaries: Bali A Window to Twentieth Century Indonesian Art that is currently touring Australia.

Around the turn of the millennium, he shifted from his simplicity and clarity of form to embark upon a more expressive style. His paintings drew mixed reviews. Some hailed his new paintings for their fresh dynamism and spontaneity, while others criticized him for the sloppiness evident in his busy canvases. Since then, his works have undergone a significant evolution.

Today, Made Djirna is at a turning point. His latest

paintings, featured in an exhibition entitled Milestones of Modesty held at Galeri Inggil, Jakarta, mark a progressive development in the course of his artistic career.

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He seems to have much more control over his paintings. While the subjects of his paintings remain rather busy and tend cover the entire surface of his canvases, they have become much more subdued. Such loose, hurried and even uncontrollable brushstrokes that seem to be predominant in his paintings dating from the year 2000 do not seem to appear any more in his current work.

Djirna's signature abstraction of the late 1990s, which reduces figures into simple curvilinear forms of lines and colors, have also been replaced with a new cubistic abstraction of a more analytical kind. He breaks down three dimensional volumes into two-dimensional facets or planes of hues, as can be seen in as can clearly be seen in the faces of the women in *Wanita Nelayan* (Fisher-

woman) and of the men in *Di Arena* (At the Arena).

Volumes once again become shapes, but they are no longer the flat simple shapes in the paintings of the late 1990s. Built up using layers of brushstrokes, the new shapes such as the figures in *Pasar Pagi* (Morning Market) are more volumetric. The shapes are modulated, providing a substantial sense of three-dimensionality.

In the new paintings the artist also uses a brighter palette of colors. The three main figures in *Sandal Jepit* (Sandal) wear bright red sandals, underlining the artist's point of focus. Yet, the figures themselves also wear bright colored *kebayas*, which appear much bolder than any other figure featured in Djir-

na's earlier paintings. Rilex initially would seem to be a simple rendition of bright colored sunflowers, but after closer observation into the painting the viewer would decipher a whimsical rendition of two figures cuddled up underneath a thick blanket of bold patterns with their dark feet sticking out.

In summary, his recent artistic development is characterized by his use of a more analytical, cubistic and volumetric shapes, built up with a more diverse palette of

brighter colors, and executed with more controlled brushwork, filling up the canvas.

"To me this development is simply a progression of time and space. It happened naturally without any conscious plans for artistic or stylistic change," claims the artist.

While there seems to be a rather clear line distinguishing the artist's recent style from his earlier paintings, the artist continues to explore themes of everyday life which he has consistently depicted in his art over the years. He has been very interested in the life that surrounds him in the village of Kedewatan, Bali, where he has lived all his life.

"As the world becomes more sophisticated and as technology has drastically changed the way people live particularly in big cities, there are still people living the simple life in small remote villages that have not changed much for centuries," he notes. Many of the most luxurious, internationally renowned hotels have been built around his village, yet many members of the community continue with the modest daily life they have always been living.

Djirna does not capitalize on the irony of the stark contrasts of lifestyle that he sees happening around his village. Seldom does he include paraphernalia



Galeri Inggil

Melirik (Eying, 2002), oil on canvas, 240cm by 140cm, by Made Djirna.

of technology that symbolizes modern sophistication within his renderings of simple everyday life. Yet, as seems evident in the awkward interaction between the mother and her child in *Bermain* (Playing), it seems that the artist has also started to question the psychological and sociological ramifications of modernity on village family life.

paintings are modest, matter-of-fact renditions of daily life. The artist claims that through his paintings he simply intends to draw attention to the everyday life of the common people that surround him, and at the same time show appreciation for their significant role in society and life. It is, in fact, an artist's humble hope for a life of modesty. His peculiar combination

of stylistic transformation and continued thematic exploration has brought him to a unique turning point, a milestone of modesty.

Made Djirna's Milestones of Modesty is on show at the Galeri Inggil, Jakarta, until April 24, 2003.

For the most part, Djirna's