

Geoff Todd depicts

'Ramayana' in paintings



JP/Carla Bianpoen

KUSA AND LAVA

Carla Bianpoen

Contributor
Jakarta

On Jan. 17, Geoff Todd's painting exhibition was opened to specially invited guests of Losari Resort near Magelang, some one-and-a-half-hours drive from Yogyakarta.

Supported by UBS banking and organized by the Yogyakarta CaSa CaSinta Gallery in cooperation with the Losari Resort, the thirty-six works for sale will be exhibited until Jan. 31.

The paintings are Geoff Todd's artistic translation of specific texts in Maharshi Valmiki's renowned retelling of the Ramayana story.

Valmiki's Ramayana is an epic poem, that, over the centuries, has made its way to almost every corner of South-east Asia.

There are of course various interpretations of the Ramayana, but it is essentially a love story which ends tragical-

ly when Lord Rama forsakes his love and presses Sita, his wife, to prove her chastity. She does and disappears into the depths of the Earth.

Todd said after reading one translation of the Valmiki Ramayana, he was so fascinated he went on to read two other translations. Those he read were translated by Makahn Lal Sen, William Buck, and Garret-Kam.

Trying to probe deep into the various events of the story, Todd's images, which 'translate' selected texts are neither Indian, nor Indonesian. Most

of his paintings are abstract, but at times reminiscent of cartoons, though flashes of earlier works of faces appear. An example is the painting titled *Rama*, a green colored face with thick lips, almond shaped eyes and a flat nose.

Yet, it comes as quite a surprise that he has stuck with texts without apparent questioning. Was he so ab-

sorbed in the text, that representing Sita as a strong woman, for instance, never entered his mind?

It would have been in line

with his usual way of setting things straight, and adjusting to adjusting to contemporary values, as he previously did in his series of Christian images, and in his fight for the cause of Aboriginal authorship.

Among the texts that are translated into images are a black cat with white stripes, and a red line which forms an ear and attacking eyes. These images were a translation of the text, "Then Hanoman

diminished his body to the dimensions of a cat and became wonderful to behold."

Another work was an exact representation of the text, "Someone rested her head on another's breast, while a third lay upon the latter's head, one was lying on another's lap, while a third one slept over the former's bosom".

The Crow painting of a woman being attacked by a crow represented the lines, "The Crow too again came near me and tore my breast with his beak." In *Kusa and Lava* the open mouths of the two figures depicted suggest-

ed the words, "Kusa and Lava began to sing, they sang "Be at your ease, free your mind from ill-will and all unkindness. Let go of anger and hear us without malice". Sita's plight is illustrated in a translation of the words "If I have never thought of any person but Rama, then let Mother Earth be divided and let me enter into it."

Geoff Todd is an Australian artist of international repute. Born in 1950, he set out to pursue education in the arts, respectively obtaining a graduate diploma in visual arts, a diploma of Fine Arts and a Diploma of Technical Teaching. Growing up in the Catholic tradition, he completed a large painting of Christ on the cross at age sixteen.

When he moved to the Northern Territory, two years of involvement with the aboriginal people and their art gave his work a new direction. His ensuing travel to other parts of the world broadened his palette even more.

His paintings of the Indonesian hero Diponegoro caused quite a stir, with some people believing he was a mystic filled with the hero's spirit.

Another stir was created when he painted in his own blood to protest urban dealers questioning of the provenance of Aboriginal art. Blood samples on the back of paintings would authenticate the artists' works as indigenous, he thought.



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HANOMAN AS CAT

Although attendance of the exhibition was limited, during the weekend of Jan. 17 and Jan. 18, half of the works, which were priced between A\$750 and A\$12,500, were sold.

*Paintings from Valmiki's Ramayana, by Geoff Todd
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