

Late Hendra Gunawan's

sketches behind bars

Hendra Gunawan, who died in Bandung at 65 in 1983, left a legacy of a pile of sketches to Nuraini, his second wife. These sketches were made in pencil or ink on small-sized pieces of paper, some even still in his old notebook.

When he was still alive, the 1976, 65-page notebook with a yellowed cover was one of his "faithful companions". It was here that he unburdened his grievances as a political detainee in Kebon Waru penitentiary, Bandung, West Java, in the 1970s.

His other "faithful companions" were obviously oils and canvases, besides his faithful wife and children, his regular visitors while he was behind bars.

Yusuf Susilo Hartono

Contributor,
Jakarta

Hendra Gunawan, noted for his painting titled *Revolutionary Bride*, was one of the founders of the Indonesian Fine Art Academy (ASRI) in Yogyakarta — now renamed the Indonesian Arts Institute (ISI) of Yogyakarta.

He was incarcerated in Kebon Waru for his involvement in the Institute of Popular Culture (Lekra), a cultural organization affiliated with the now-defunct Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). It was not until 1978 that he was set free.

In his youth, Gunawan actively joined the Student Troops and was an active member of Poetera (Center of Popular Power), an organization led by the national leadership quartet: Sukarno, Hatta, Ki Hadjar Dewantara and KH Mansur. He was also active in Persagi (the Association of Indonesian Painters), an organization of painters set up by S. Soedjojono and Agus Djaya in 1938.

About 50 sketches, generally little known to the public, have been selected from what he left behind and are now being exhibited at **d gallerie**, opposite Pertamina Hospital, for three weeks this February.

"I hope this rare exhibition will attract a lot of visitors," said Ulfa Waworuntu, a

daughter of former education and culture minister, Fuad Hassan, who manages the gallery.

Upon close observation, we can find that these sketches have as their object the face of the artist, the busy activities of fishermen on the coast, fishes, water buffaloes, women (making up, wearing a sarong, nude, dancing with faces masked), men and women in intimate love relationships, masked men, guerrillas and abstract forms better exploring his innermost feelings.

The sketches generally consist of thin and flexible lines that run on spontaneously and uninterruptedly, unyielding to the empirical reality. We can feel that these lines are laden

with human feeling such as loneliness, longing, rebellion, introspection and love. (Unfortunately, no details can be given to illustrate this aspect of the sketches as the works have no titles. The gallery does not think it has the right to give titles to these sketches.)

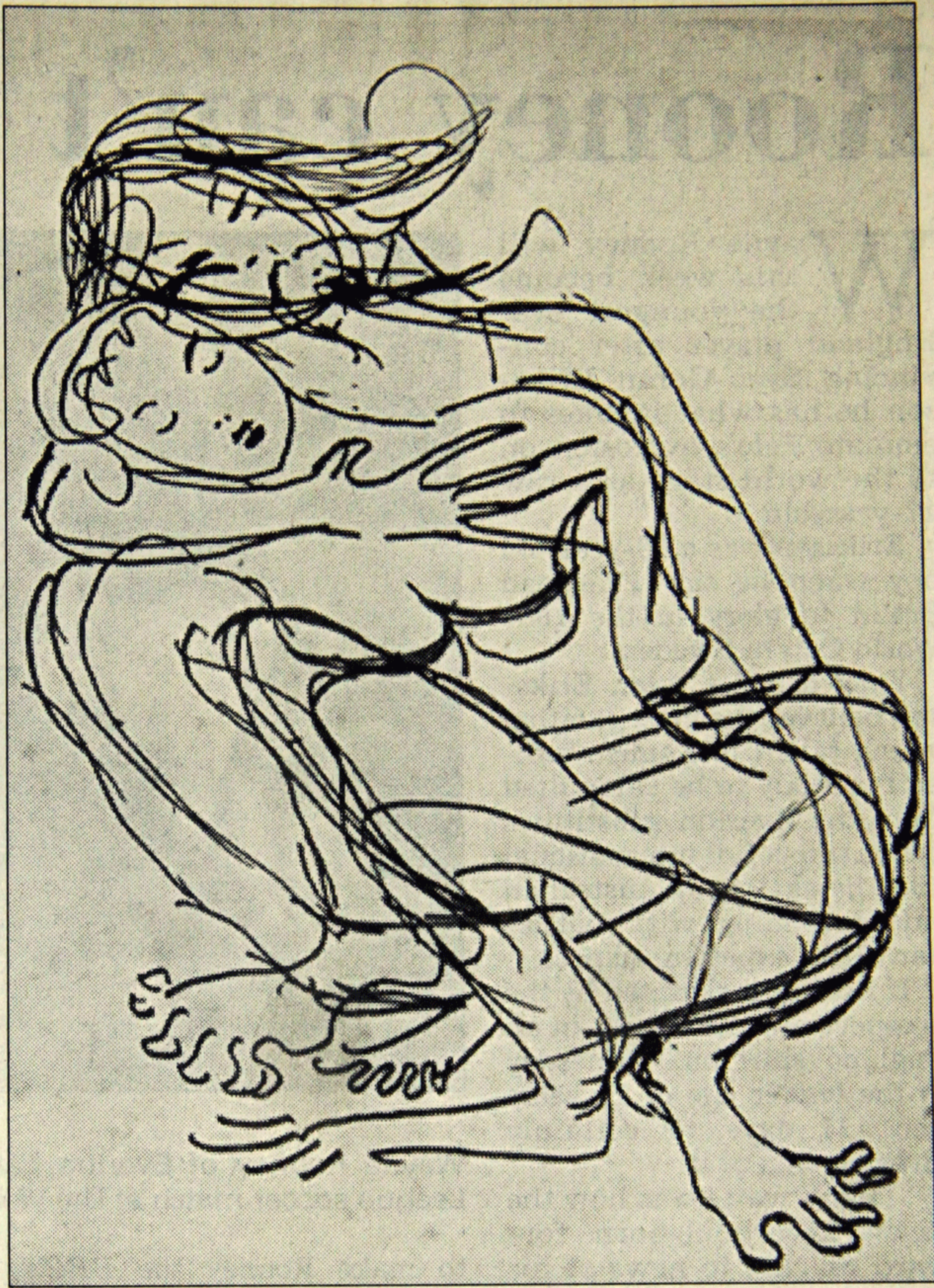
Try, however, to pore over one of the sketches appearing along with this article.

It depicts the yearning embrace of a man for a woman. Even if the sketch does not contain any signature or date, we can guess that the figure with a reverse-triangle-shaped beard must be the artist himself.

Now look at his oil paintings in a book titled *Hendra Gunawan, A Great Modern Indonesian Painter* (published by Ciputra Foundation in 2001). It would be wrong to say that this particular sketch must be the original inspiration for at least two paintings under the same title, *My Wife and I after the Second Bell*, made in 1973 and 1976. Both are coded "kw", which stands for Kebon Waru, the prison in Bandung.

Although the position of the objects in these two paintings is the same, the image they produce is different. The 1973 painting, now collected by Ciputra Foundation, is bursting with an expression of love while the 1976 one conveys an image of tranquility. Unfortunately, this painting, in the collection of the Jakarta Arts Council, is now in rather bad shape. Several years ago, a dancer who was staying at TIM used a razor blade to cut it out of the frame and rolled it up. As a result, the painting became cracked. (Strangely, the thief still walks free today.)

The sketch about "Hendra hugging his first wife", most probably made in prison, may be viewed as the scheme or design for the oil painting. So, with his other sketches, for example, one about a guerrilla (in pencil) and another about a coast and fishermen offering fish to a woman with large breasts and broad feet, may



JP/Yusuf Susilo Hartono

One of Hendra Gunawan's untitled sketches he made in Kebon Waru prison, Bandung.

also belong to this category, i.e. they inspired the creation of subsequent oil paintings.

Of course, many of the sketches on display are purely sketches as "independent, complete and finished" works in the term used by Agus Dermawan T, an Indonesian art observer.

The note that Agus Dermawan T, a graduate of ASRI, has made shows to us that Hendra Gunawan, from the beginning of his painting career, considered sketching as his core art. When he was guiding members of Popular Painters, an organization of painters in Yogyakarta, in the 1940s, for example, he offered sketching as the main subject the participants had to master. When he taught in ASRI in the

1950s, he also put strong stress on the subject of sketching.

Unfortunately, we may never be able to see Hendra Gunawan's sketches completely, particularly those that he made in the "battlefield", as these sketches have been destroyed. Luckily, today we can still enjoy his prison sketches. At the same time we can pay homage to him.

The exhibition runs from Feb. 7 through Feb. 28, 2003 at d gallerie, Jl. Barito I No 3, Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta. Tel. 7399378-79.
