

# Samuel's sculptures lift cardboard 'caste' to higher art

Cardboard can turn itself into a respectable item in the hands of fine artist Samuel Indratma, one of the prominent names at *Apotik Komik* (Comics Drugstore) Yogyakarta.

Cardboard, which usually only serves as packaging or humble serving material, is transformed into the subject, the master and the content itself — all rolled into one — and enjoys the central spotlight.

The evidence of cardboard's new honorable status can be seen at Samuel's solo exhibition, titled *Begadang 3* (Staying Up Late), Samuel Indratma: *Kerja dengan Kertas* (Working with Paper), held at Galeri Lontar, Jl. Utan Kayu 68 H, East Jakarta, due to run through Nov. 11.

The exhibition title refers to two previous albums of Indonesia's top *dangdut* (local music with Indian nuance) singer, Rhoma Irama, *Begadang 1* and *Begadang 2*,

which contain the philosophical lyric: "Staying up late is OK as long as it is meaningful ..."

Samuel, a graduate of the Indonesian Arts Institute Yogyakarta, manages to turn cardboard into a visual medium for expressing his comical, rebellious and often "playful-

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but-serious" concepts.

For example, his theme around hope and fear of terror in the reform era; Two of the seven series of *From Horror to Hope*, 1998, are papier mache pieces, looking like a wooden drum or a boat, priced at Rp 14.5 million.

His other works include *Pension* (Pension), 1999, telling us about the loneliness of old age and made of an ink-col-

ored cardboard collage, Rp 3 million; *Emily*, 2001, about a woman without a heart and feelings and made in the form of a paper doll, Rp 7.2 million; *Standing Cupboard*, 2001, about the burdens of life, comprising four cardboard sculptures painted in ink and using collage, Rp 4.5 million; *Drawing on Cupboard*, 2001, about upside-down values and consisting of cardboard collages in nine glass boxes, Rp 4.5 million. He has also made creations about the recent air strikes on the World Trade Center in New York.

Samuel's works also include the internal organs or parts of human beings — the heart, liver, veins, intestines and so on — which use acrylic paint on canvas in various sizes and carry a price tag of Rp 3 million to Rp 4 million.

His paintings are not as attractive as his paper creations. He honestly admitted this in an interview with Nir-

wan Dewanto, which is published in the catalog, adding that he always felt nervous and awkward about working on canvas. He said, however, he would like to keep on trying other media to enable him to become as proficient as Arswendo Atmowiloto, who has mastered various media of expression.

Laymen as well as collectors consider cardboard "lower caste" in comparison with canvas. Aside from such classification, Samuel's sculptures in paper and cardboard have become important as they are an eye-opener. They make us fully aware of the democratization of media.

His works further emphasize that each medium, including cardboard, has its own unique beauty.

His paper sculpture, *The Standing Cupboard*, for instance, speaks for itself.

As a fine artist who is also greatly involved in comic

strips, Samuel seems to be less confident that lines, colors, space, composition and other visual elements have their own strength and suggestions that exceed words.

The lack of confidence leads him to include words in many of his works. His *Drawing on Cupboard* painting shows a man with his leg raised and from his groin comes the word "Art".

Another painting depicts a terrorist carrying a bomb hanging in the clouds and has the phrase, "Take this."

That, in essence, is the rebelliousness of Samuel, who was born in Gombong, Central Java, on Dec. 22, 1970. He is having fun with the aesthetics of cardboard.

He certainly does not pretend to create noble or "high caste" pieces, based on current norms. But his work in the exhibition has established a kind of art that does not easily succumb to the market.