

'Wearable' show promotes Asia-Pacific artists

By Chandra Johan

JAKARTA (JP): In a country where law and justice are not upheld, people feel unsafe and uncomfortable. As they can no longer count on the security apparatus, they make every effort to protect themselves in a variety of ways. Those who have money buy pistols or other guns. More women take self-defense classes or even wear the controversial anti-rape corset created by a Bandung engineer.

Last May, when anti-Chinese riots rocked the city, some people wrote on the walls of their houses or shops: Indigenous Property, Muslim Property, The Property of Haj So and So, or Proreformation. Others affixed prayer mats or wrote Koran verses on the buildings. It might seem absurd, but in fact, the texts and signs were used as a form of protection. Why must military troops, the police, civilian security officers, or even political party security members wear certain uniforms identified by special colors? We could see the uniforms as a means to protect themselves. However, in the public's subconscious, a military uniform pro-

voles fear and nervousness when spotted.

In contemporary art, the meaning of signs in every object is part of what is explored, as opposed to the shape or "intrinsic" beauty of a piece. Everything we wear, whether it is a hat, a shirt, trousers, shoes and so on, has a certain meaning and value.

These meanings and values are explored by a number of contemporary artists from the Asia Pacific region in a touring exhibition with the theme *Wearable*. The first exhibition, held in Galeri Padi, Bandung, finished earlier this month. It will move on to Bentara Budaya, Yogyakarta, and later in the year come to Jakarta.

According to the curator of the exhibition Rifky Effendi, *Wearable* had its genesis in November 1998. He talked to the artists in person, by phone, fax or e-mail. Rifky says the project will last until the year

2000 or 2001 and may later tour overseas.

Wearable was created from recent observations and experiences on Indonesian social life. *Wearable* literally means "something which can be worn" for comfort, beauty, and, at the same time, safety. In society this term is associated with the discourse of fashion. "But, according to my interpretation this term is associated with values of protection, self-confidence and self-identity," Rifky Effendi said. In other words, because it possesses value, it can be worn according to the context.

Participating in the exhibition are Astari Rasjid, Gani Ruswandi, W. Christiawan, Mella Jaarsma and Alexandra J. Wuisan (all from Indonesia), Damon Moon (Australia), Midora Hirota (Japan), France Alleblas (Holland), Mongkol Pilenbangchang (Thailand), Minako Saitoh (Japan), David Sequeira (Australia) and Choi Jeong-Hwa and Hyesung Park (South Korea).

Astari Rasjid presents an installation work *Pseudo-*

Security. This work explores the *kebaya* dress (women's blouse, the front of which is pinned together) and its attributes in Javanese feudal society. The piece triggers the question whether clothes define our body and self-identity, but at the same time hide our true self. According to Astari's interpretation, the *kebaya* phenomenon in Javanese society is still apparent: every uniform in society covers up identity.

Damon Mood from Australia presents the installation *Peci Stack*: a pile of peci (national cap) in the form of a pyramid. For Damon, a peci is a neutral object — an Indonesian characteristic, not an ethnic attribute. The pyramid form depicts a bad social system, in which most people — represented by the lower section — bear burdens, while at the very top, a small number of people lead an easy life all the time.

Hi, Inlander, an installation by Mella Jaarsma, invites us to consider the meaning of "indigenouness". (*Inlander* is the term used by the Dutch colonialists for indigenous people.) The artist has

covered a doll with the skin of a frog, to question the government's policies regarding "snake eaters". *Steike* are Chinese frog dishes. Clearly, the artist is referring to *snake eaters* as the Chinese-Indonesians.

David Sequeira from Australia combines an Indonesian traditional dress design with the camouflage gear of the military in *Inside Out*. Adorning Indonesian traditional clothes with military designs, David semiotically refers to the bureaucratic feudalism and power, present in all facets of Indonesian life, including art and culture.

Alexandra J. Wuisan presents a paper torso titled *Infinity*. It takes the shape of a dress, but without any sewing and without any attributes to indicate social meaning. With *Infinity*, he suggests that a dress that has not been sewn, has superior meaning as a dress, not as a symbol, and therefore can exist in an infinite situation, space and time.

In addition to installations, photography, drawings and paintings are also on show.

It is interesting to see

Ruswandi Abdul Gani's *Aesthetic's Body, Body's Aesthetic*, a photography work of a row of figures making various gestures. Body painting becomes a new representation. We are invited not merely to consider the beauty of the body, but also the painting of the body, or the arrangement of this in his photos. In his work we also face semantic problems.

Mongkol Pilenbangchang presents a mixed-media installation art work in *Bloody Flag* and asks us some basic questions: where has democracy gone? Where have all the victims gone? What do we live for? What do we die for? Such quandaries are not only raised in Mongkol's work, they are also presented by Minako Saitoh in *Behind the Mood*, Frances Alleblas in *Reunion*, W. Christiawan in *Get well soon, Indonesia* and in Choi Jeoung's video-installation on Korean culture. Gender questions are posed in Astari's work and Hyesung Park's.

The *Wearable* project offers an interesting discourse on the Indonesian motif in contemporary art.



Ruswandi Abdul Gani's *Esthetic's Body, Body's Esthetics*.

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Astari Rasjid's *Pseudo-Security*.

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